

13 Students Remain

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13 Students Remain

by [whattheskyknows](#)

Summary

Kaede Akamatsu wakes up inside of a classroom alone.

(Time loop AU where the only way to leave the game is to survive.)

(Quick note, each chapter comes with additional warnings in the top notes if needed!)

Notes

So I might've started a new fic :D

I'd like to say that if this idea has already been done then I'm sorry if it looks like I'm copying. If this specific idea has already been done then it's pure coincidence!

I'm not sure how quickly this fic is going to be updated. This is the only chapter I've wrote so far. I think I'm just going to post this and see if people want to see more of it or not

ahaha. I've recently just finished a super long fic and I didn't plan to start another long one so soon, so I cannot guarantee fast updates for this fic since I still want to take some sort of break ahaha :)

Although I did manage to write this entire chapter in one go since I was so excited to write something new :D

As seen in the tags this fic is a time loop one but it's going to be done a little differently since no one knows that they're in a time loop. I'm not going to spoil the entire fic but all I can say is that each loop is going to be explored differently and that there's going to be a new protagonist for every loop (and it's also going to be obvious when a new loop starts in the later chapters)

The first couple chapters of this fic are going to be experimental as to how long they're going to be. In theory I'm going to be writing the same killing game over and over in this fic so some areas might be shortened drastically such as class trials for example

However, I'm not going to post a chapter unless I'm 100% satisfied with it either so updates may take a while if I end up disliking a chapter and decide to rewrite it

Anyway, I hope you all enjoy my writing! Have a nice day!

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 1 Part 1

Kaede Akamatsu wakes up in a darkness that feels familiar. It's a darkness that feels like an old friend, or perhaps an old enemy would be more fitting. It's lonely and tight and suffocating and it's somewhere she's been before.

She reaches out her hand and presses, eyes widening in surprise when her hand connects against something smooth and metal. The darkness disappears and for the first time ever Kaede can finally see where she is. She spots desks and chairs and windows that are covered in sharp wires. There's also wooden floors and a sliding door.

After a couple of seconds of simply staring, Kaede finally snaps out of it enough to leave the...locker? Why is she inside of a locker? She grimaces as she takes a hesitant step forward, her shoe connecting with the floor. It seems she's inside of a classroom but she doesn't recognise it at all. If she's inside of a school then it certainly isn't hers. Perhaps she went to another school and fell asleep? But that doesn't make sense. Why would she fall asleep, standing up no less, inside of a locker? Did someone put her inside of it as a prank?

Pull yourself together, Kaede! She quickly slaps both of her cheeks with her hands as she glances around. *How about I think about something else for a moment. I know, let's think of a song that would calm me down right now? Oh, I know! How about Gymnopedie No.1 by Erik Satie. Yeah, I think it's working!*

Kaede pumps her fists as she starts to slowly calm down. *Things are really scary right now but I don't have time to freak out. Things probably feel worse since I'm all by myself right now but maybe there's others around? I can't be the only person here, right?* She takes a look at the classroom door and swallows. *Then again, things would feel better if I hadn't woken up all by myself. Maybe I should take a quick look around and see if there's anyone else here?*

She kneels down carefully as she checks under all the desks, pulling her skirt firmly around her legs as she crouches up and down, checking every nook and cranny of the classroom. All she finds is dust, weeds and wires. She pouts before going back over to the lockers. Her locker is still wide open from where she had stepped out of it. However, there is a second locker...

If someone else is in this classroom then they've gotta be inside of this one! Kaede all too excitedly pulls open the locker door and feels a lump form in her throat when it's empty. *Why am I getting so upset? If someone had been inside then they probably would've left as soon as I had anyway. It's just...I really was hoping that someone would be inside. Now I have to leave the classroom all by myself.*

The classroom door opens rather easily when Kaede pulls it open. She's met with a rather spacious looking hallway, although instead of being messy like the classroom is, the hallway looks like it has been cleaned. It's a strange contrast compared to the classroom she had just been inside of. She narrows her eyes and opens the classroom door back up again just to check she wasn't seeing things.

Huh?! The classroom...it's clean now?! But I swear it was covered in weeds and dust just seconds ago! This doesn't make any sense at all! This...this has gotta be just a dream. Maybe if I pinch myself hard enough then I'll wake up?

Kaede winces when she pinches the skin on her arm tightly, leaving the skin an angry red colour. When she doesn't suddenly wake up from whatever nightmarish situation she's in, she pulls a face.

Why is she such a mess right now? Her sister would be laughing at her if she saw the state she was in. Here she is getting all spooked because she woke up all by herself inside of a classroom. Things could surely be worse right now, right? She could be waking up in the back of a van or in some stranger's home. She's only inside of a school! Surely there must be some teachers somewhere.

"Oh, um, excuse me!"

Kaede's heart starts to hammer as she swirls around quickly, her skirt fluttering around her as she spots a girl running down the hallway. Finally, she's found someone else! Well, it's more like someone else has found her but at least she's now not alone!

A girl stops right in front of her, looking more nervous than Kaede feels. She has long, beautiful blue hair that tumbles down her back in waves. It reminds Kaede of the ocean. She's wearing a dark blue uniform that matches her hair and a pair of glasses. The girl's skin also seems to be on the paler side but Kaede quickly realises that it must be because of how nervous the girl is right now.

The girl wrings her hands together in front of her as she peers into the classroom. "I, um..."

"Are you okay?" Kaede asks. She can't help but feel sorry for the girl due to the state she's in.

"I'm..." The girl bites her lip. "I'm plainly confused right now."

"Oh, me too!" Kaede responds, feeling a little relieved. "I woke up inside of a locker! Is this your school by the way? I'm kind of confused why I woke up here."

"This isn't my school," the girl says as she shakes her head. "And I woke up here too, just down the hallway on the floor. I was all by myself and it was really scary."

"Well luckily we've found each other!" Kaede pumps her fists again. She has a feeling that if she shows how scared she is right now then the girl might get spooked. "So let's stick together and try and find a teacher maybe? Or at least an exit of some sorts."

The girl with classes scrunches up her face before giving Kaede a small nod. "But, um, before we do that...did you wake up all by yourself?"

"That's right," Kaede answers as she points at the locker she woke up in. "I woke up in there. I checked the classroom over and over again to see if there was anyone else inside but it turns out I was the only person who woke up in there. U-Unless someone else did wake up but just left me on my own?"

The girl's eyes widened. "Oh! Maybe that could've happened! Although that doesn't sound right..."

"Yeah!" Kaede frowns. "It would be really rude if someone did leave me all alone! They should've woken me up!"

"That's not what I..." The girl sighs. "Everything just seems...really wrong at the moment. I'm just glad that I ran into you."

"Me too!" Kaede's eyes suddenly go wide. "I never introduced myself! My name is Kaede Akamatsu!"

"I'm Tsumugi Shirogane," the girl, no, Tsumugi says as she gives Kaede's skirt a look. "Um, do you really like music or something?"

“I hope I do!” Kaede laughs. “I’m the Ultimate Pianist after all!”

“Oh, so you’re an Ultimate too?” Tsumugi clasps her hands together. “I’m the Ultimate Cosplayer!”

“Another Ultimate?” Kaede’s eyes go wide. Usually Ultimates are spread across the entire world so it’s rather unusual to meet one. Kaede herself has never met another Ultimate before, especially not one as pretty as Tsumugi.

“I know it’s surprising that I am an Ultimate,” Tsumugi says almost bitterly. “I’m the most plain person you’ll ever meet.”

Kaede frowns. “Hey, don’t speak about yourself like that. You’re not plain, you’re cute! People would have to be blind to ignore you!”

Tsumugi’s cheeks go pink. “O-Oh! That’s a rather bold thing to say to someone you’ve only just met!”

“But it’s true,” Kaede says with a giggle. She’s feeling a lot better now. All of her previous anxiety is almost non-existent. She clears her throat. “Hey, maybe we should start exploring now. Together?”

“We...should,” Tsumugi agrees before her eyes go wide. “Oh, Akamatsu? Did you, um, get one of these?”

Tsumugi pulls out a tablet from her pocket. Its surface is sleek and it looks almost brand new. There are a couple of fingerprints on it however. Tsumugi must’ve already turned hers on.

“Um...” Kaede pats her pockets before checking her bag. Her eyes go wide as she finds a tablet inside of it and pulls it out. However, what surprises her is that her tablet looks like it’s already been used and as well as that there seems to be some scratches on it. She frowns. Her bag is empty so there shouldn’t be small scratches on her screen.

She turns it on and starts to navigate it. The tablet has her name on it as it boots up. She’s then met with a pink screen and a couple of menus to select. She slowly starts to go through them. Kaede then raises an eyebrow at a couple of the options. Truth bullets? Report Cards? Rules? What do all of these mean? The truth bullet section seems empty as if someone had just completely cleared what was on it but the report card section...

“Is something wrong?” Tsumugi asks nervously as she inches closer to Kaede’s tablet. “You’re pulling a scary face.”

“It’s...” Kaede starts to go through the Report Cards. This section has already been unlocked and...completed? Sort of? There’s sixteen icons lining the top of the screen, each icon showing a face. Kaede quickly spots her face as well as Tsumugi’s. Kaede also spots that three of the icons are glitching out. When she taps on one of the glitching icons the screen freezes for a moment before showing a rather blank report card.

There’s a portrait of a girl with brown hair tied into pigtails. Her red eyes stare back at Kaede. The portrait gives off a rather...menacing aura. Kaede shudders. The report card says that this student is called Maki Harukawa. There’s only one line of information about her.

This student has graduated.

The same thing is written for the other two glitched boxes, which belong to two people called

Shuichi Saihara and Himiko Yumeno.

I wonder...who these people are. How come those three have graduated but no one else has? Have I even met them before?

“That’s really strange,” Tsumugi says, causing Kaede to let out a yelp. Tsumugi also lets out a cry. “Oh, I’m sorry! I thought you knew I was standing next to you. I said I was really plain!”

“S-Sorry!” Kaede says with a wince before pointing at her screen. “But it’s like you said, this is really strange! I wonder why those three people have graduated but no one else has? Maybe they’re just older than us?”

“I...I plainly don’t know,” Tsumugi admits. “I don’t recognise a single one of them either. But we’re both on the line of people too. S-See, that’s me right there!”

Tsumugi presses down on her own face and the tablet opens up her report card. This report card includes a lot more information about Tsumugi compared to the other three students. When Kaede clicks on her portrait, she finds her report card also has quite a bit of information on it too. She clicks another portrait at random and finds that the profile also has a lot of information on it.

“This is...so weird,” Kaede murmurs as she grips onto her tablet tightly. “Hey, Shirogane? Do you think that everyone who is on this tablet is inside of the school maybe? Perhaps we should go and look for them? Hopefully at least one person will know what’s going on...”

“I-I want to see what else is on the tablets,” Tsumugi quickly responds as she pulls out her own tablet. “Because this plainly doesn’t make any sense! W-Why are we all on this tablet now? No one knows each other so...huh? Rules? Why are the rules here?”

“I really don’t know myself,” Kaede tells her as she takes a step back. “S-Shirogane, you need to calm down!”

Tsumugi ignores her as she hunches over her tablet, her finger quickly tapping the screen over and over again. Then, Tsumugi lets out a loud scream before dropping her tablet onto the floor. Kaede’s eyes go wide when she sees what is on the screen.

‘Once a murder takes place, all surviving students must participate in a class trial.’

Kaede feels her legs go weak. Why would a rule like this be on the tablet? She’s a student, right? Just what is this tablet implying? That students have to kill each other? That...she’s woken up in some random school and being forced to kill others? This has to be some sick and twisted joke. There’s no way that...

Tsumugi still hasn’t stopped screaming. Her back is pressed against the wall and her chest is rising up and down rapidly as she tries to take in some deep breaths. Kaede forces her own worry away as she takes one of Tsumugi’s hands. “Hey, Shirogane...”

“I don’t understand what’s going on!” Tsumugi cries as her fingers dig deeply into Kaede’s own hand. The blonde barely manages to hold back a wince. “Why are the rules...”

Kaede doesn’t know whether to feel panic or relief when she hears another set of footsteps dash up what sounds like to be a set of stairs. She turns her head slightly to the side to see a guy with green hair and a very distressed expression on his face. His face goes firm when he spots the two girls.

Was he on the tablet? Maybe. My mind is too muddled to think things through properly right now. He doesn’t look dangerous but after seeing a rule like that...I don’t know who I can even trust right

now. I don't think Shirogane is going to be a threat but I also don't think she's capable of defending herself if someone did attack her. I...I need to do something! Quick!

Kaede lets go of Tsumugi's hand to stand in front of her, throwing her arms out and using her body as a shield. She misses how Tsumugi's eyes go wide in favour of watching the green haired guy stop in his tracks. "I don't know who you are but you better leave us both alone or... or you'll regret it! I'll fight back if I have to!"

"A-Akamatsu?" Tsumugi murmurs in awe.

"Woah there..." The guy with green hair holds up his hands in surrender or perhaps it's mock surrender. Kaede isn't sure how seriously he's taking her at the moment. "I'm guessing you both saw the rules too?"

Kaede narrows her eyes. "That's right, we did. So don't take another step closer until...until I figure out what to do with you."

"I promise I'm not here to hurt either of you," the guy says with a frown. "In fact, the only reason I ran up here was because I heard screaming. I thought that someone was already being murdered."

"Hold on a second!" Kaede starts to sweat. "You thought that *I* was killing someone!? B-But I would never do that! *Ever!*"

"And I can see that now," the guy says before giving Tsumugi a small smile. "It's lucky that the two of you found each other, huh? But you can't go around screaming like that for no reason, you might scare people or give off the wrong idea."

"I..." Tsumugi bites her lip. "The rules really scared me, that's all..."

The green haired guy looks at the two girls again before sighing, rubbing the back of his head. "It looks like we've all gotten off on the wrong foot. How about we all introduce ourselves, yeah? Believe me when I say that it's going to be hard to trust each other in a situation like this but I'd at least like to know who everyone is."

Kaede gives the guy a hard stare. *He seems to be a rather chill person by the way he talks, although I'm pretty sure he's a lot more frazzled than he's letting on right now. He's struggling to keep eye contact with either of us at the moment. But still...maybe we all did get off on the wrong foot. If we are forced to kill each other then maybe it's better we start making friends now. I know I'd find it hard to kill a friend if I had to...*

"Kaede Akamatsu," Kaede says as she holds out a hand for the guy to shake. "I'm the Ultimate Pianist."

"The Ultimate Pianist, huh?" The guy raises an eyebrow at Tsumugi. "Are you also an Ultimate?"

"I'm Tsumugi Shirogane, the Ultimate Cosplayer," Tsumugi replies, refusing to give the guy any eye contact. Could it be that she's embarrassed after he scolded her?

"Two Ultimates? Impressive." The guy puts a hand to his chin. "I'm Rantaro Amami. I'm also an Ultimate but it seems I can't remember my talent."

"You can't remember your talent?" Kaede raises an eyebrow. "That's..."

"Suspicious?" Rantaro laughs awkwardly. "Believe me, I know how bad this sounds. Unfortunately you'll both have to take my word for it, although I wouldn't blame either of you if

you can't trust me at the moment."

"It is suspicious but..." Kaede takes a deep breath. "I'll trust you. For now. But the moment you remember your talent you tell everyone, deal?"

"Deal," Rantaro agrees as he shakes Kaede's hand. He has a firm grip and all of the cold rings on his fingers makes Kaede almost shiver. "Hey, Shirogane, was it? Do you want to shake on it too?"

Tsumugi shakes her head, still refusing to look him in the eye. "Sorry, Amami, but you're too plainly suspicious for me to trust right now."

"Shirogane..." Kaede murmurs before clapping her hands together, causing her two new friends to jump. "Right! It's about time we started to explore the area. For now we should ignore those rules on the tablet. After all, we could just be a part of some big prank or something. Let's all try to keep calm!"

"Whatever you say, Akamatsu," Rantaro responds as he bends down to pick up Tsumugi's dropped tablet. "Hey, you dropped this by the way."

Tsumugi takes the tablet back wordlessly and puts it into her pocket. She does however lightly grab Kaede's upper arm. "Um, Akamatsu? Can we explore together? I don't want to be alone right now."

"Sure!" Kaede easily answers before giving Rantaro an expectant look. "You'll join us too, right? It's probably better if we all stick together."

"Because of the rules, right?" Rantaro says. "It's probably better if we try to stay in groups. That way no one gets left behind."

Tsumugi mutters something under her breath that both Rantaro and Kaede miss.

"Maybe we should... go down this way?" Kaede suggests as she points to an open hallway. She can't help but think that she's never seen this hallway before, which is technically correct. However, she just has this feeling that there should've been a wall blocking the hallway or something...

Tsumugi shakes her head. "We should look for an exit first before going deeper into the school. I don't know about you but I don't want to run into someone dangerous and be trapped because I didn't know where the exit was."

"That's a good plan, Shirogane," Rantaro agrees. "I was just downstairs too and I never saw anyone myself so at least we know we'll be safe if we go down there."

Kaede feels her cheeks flush red. It was a bit stupid of her to suggest going further into the school like that. At least Tsumugi managed to say something smart for her instead.

Tsumugi doesn't let go of her arm as Rantaro leads them both down the stairs. It makes Kaede feel almost protective, like she has to keep Tsumugi safe from any danger. She pulls a face. Of course she'll keep Tsumugi safe and anyone else they run into too. She feels bad for the way she reacted when Rantaro found them both, especially since he was only making sure that they were both okay. She'll have to apologise to him later on.

There's a couple of hallways that lead off into different areas of the academy but they decide on going to the front door first since that's the biggest lead they've got regarding an exit. Rantaro pushes the doors open and...

“A wall?” Kaede’s eyes go wide. There’s a large glass wall surrounding the academy. Kaede feels her body go slack as her knees threaten to give out from under her for the second time today. She can feel Tsumugi squeeze her arm comfortingly.

“That’s worrying,” Rantaro says as he puts a hand to his eyes to peer up at the glass himself. “Have we been caged in?”

“T-There has to be an exit somewhere!” Kaede insists as she starts to rush down the steps. “Maybe there’s a door or-”

“There’s no door! I’ve checked a million times too!”

“Ack!”

Kaede almost falls over in surprise. It’s only thanks to Tsumugi’s grip on her arm that she doesn’t go tumbling to the ground. Standing in front of her is a rather tall guy with purple hair that defies gravity. Although, it is also likely that the guy just uses a lot of hair spray. It seems that the guy’s favourite colour is purple as he’s completely covered in it. Purple hair, purple eyes, purple clothes...

“Purple...” Kaede murmurs.

“Huh?!” The guy punches his fists together. “My name isn’t Purple! I’m Kaito Momota, Luminary of the Stars! Even crying children adore the Ultimate Astronaut!”

“But, um, why would children cry around you in the first place?” Tsumugi asks.

“S-Shut up!” Kaito pouts. “I-I was just saying!”

“Hey, can we go back to what you said before,” Rantaro says as he tries to gain control of the conversation. “Did you say that there’s no door on the glass wall?”

“Yup!” Kaito answers a little too cheerfully. “Absolutely no doors at all! I was a little worried that we might’ve missed one or something but even the Ultimate Maid checked and I trust her!”

“There’s even more Ultimates?!” Kaede blinks. Only moments ago she thought she was lucky to be in the presence of one Ultimate, now she’s around at least four...

“J-Just check the tablet for our talents later,” Tsumugi says. “I’ve already introduced myself so many times that it’s getting a little boring...”

“Well, uh...” Kaito blinks before grinning. “I woke up out here with a couple of others. There’s Angie, she’s the Ultimate Artist! Tojo’s the Ultimate Maid. Gonta is huge and a little intimidating at first but he’s the Ultimate Entomologist. Something about bugs I think? We all decided to try and find a way out before going inside since, you know, waking up to a huge glass wall is kind of scary.”

“I see,” Kaede says with a nod. Kaito is making a lot of sense. She’d be freaked out if she woke up outside and saw that she was trapped inside of a giant glass dome. *Isn’t that the situation I’m in now though? I’m surprised I’m as calm as I am at the moment. Although maybe I’m just keeping calm for Tsumugi’s sake. She seems really spooked at the moment so it’s important I don’t scare her even more.*

“So what are these tablets you were on about?” Kaito asks. “Did you find them somewhere?”

“Check your pockets for one,” Kaede says before swallowing. “Although...the rules are a little weird. We’re not sure what to think about them for now. Just, try not to panic when you read them. Maybe you and your group can read through them together?”

“Surely they can’t be that bad!” Kaito responds with a laugh, oblivious to the faces that Kaede, Tsumugi and Rantaro pull. “Anyway, I’m going to tell everyone outside that there’s more people inside. Did you three want to explore more outside? There’s honestly not much to see at the moment apart from a couple of buildings and this garage. Although, maybe give the garage a skip, it made me feel sick when I went inside.”

“Is that so?” Rantaro says before pausing. “If there’s people already outside then we might as well go back inside and find everyone else. Akamatsu, I know you wanted to find an exit but maybe we should try and find everyone and try and meet up as one big group? After that maybe we can discuss what to do next.”

“Maybe that is for the best,” Kaede agrees with a frown. “Um, before we leave...Momota, was it?”

“Yeah? What’s up?” Kaito asks.

“When you look at the rules with your group...” Kaede takes a deep breath. “Please just disregard them for now. I’m not sure if they’re on the tablet as a joke or if someone is just trying to scare us but please, just don’t follow any of them.”

Kaito’s face scrunches up in deep thought before he gives Kaede a thumbs up. “Hey, I’m not sure what’s worrying you right now but it seems you know what you’re doing. I’m going to believe in you and trust that you know what you’re doing!”

“Oh! T-Thank you!” Kaede smiles.

“When you find people, tell them to meet up at the gazebo on the bench. Once my group is done exploring out here that’s where we’ll be!” Kaito tells her before dashing off. She notices how the inside of his jacket is decorated by a fabric that resembles a galaxy. It suits him.

“I’m not sure whether he’s plainly brave or plainly stupid,” Tsumugi suddenly says. “Isn’t he a little too trusting?”

“I think he’s going to get a surprise when he checks out the rules,” Rantaro agrees. “Now how about we all go back inside and look for the others? I’m not sure how many of us there are to find. The tablet shows sixteen students but if three of them have supposedly graduated then maybe there’s only going to be thirteen of us.”

“That leaves six people for us to find inside,” Kaede says. “Or nine if the other three students do appear. I wonder what it means by graduating anyway? Have they finished school or something?”

“Um, Akamatsu? Did you read all of the rules?” Rantaro asks her as they step back inside.

“No? Why?” Kaede feels an urge to grab her tablet.

Rantaro shakes his head. “Never mind. It’s just one of the rules confuses me a little but might also explain something. Although...”

“How about we look for others for now?” Tsumugi suggests. “Like Akamatsu said before, the rules might just be one big joke. Let’s not take them too seriously for now.”

“Ah, sorry, Shirogane,” Rantaro says with a tight smile, “I didn’t realise I was scaring you.”

"I'm not scared," Tsumugi mumbles, "just plainly being cautious."

The bottom floor of the academy is rather ordinary. There's a couple of bathrooms, a dining room, a warehouse, a strange room that is full of prizes, a gym which is locked, a seating area, a room full of equipment fit for a magician, a door that leads to a room with a large spiral staircase and a couple of classrooms. There's only a couple of rooms that seem off, such as the room full of magical equipment and the prize room.

"The door with the room full of the magician's items had a strange design on it don't you think?" Tsumugi says as they walk away from it. "Actually, I think I saw another door like that upstairs when I first found Akamatsu. I think it had a piano design on it or something? However, we all left before I could point it out."

"Maybe its got a piano inside?" Kaede suggests excitedly. She can feel her fingers start to itch. Now she wants to play a song, even if it is just to lighten up the mood.

"How about we explore upstairs later? I want to get a good look at the ground floor," Rantaro says as he points to some stairs that go into the basement. "Maybe there's people down there?"

Kaede and Tsumugi insist that Rantaro goes down first, which he does with a laugh. Kaede feels a little bad for pushing him but it seems he doesn't mind. Besides, he also has a compass looking design on his shirt. Maybe his talent has something to do with exploring? Kaede will have to ask him later.

It's a little dark downstairs, although bright enough to see. However, areas that are hidden in the shadows seem extra dark down here. Kaede takes a mental note not to come down here on her own or during night-time. That is if she's still in this dumb place still. Surely she and everyone else will be leaving soon?

The first room they go into is large and full of books and-

Kaede puts a hand to her mouth as she suddenly gags. For a moment, the world twists and she feels nauseous. She thinks she falls to the floor because her legs suddenly start to hurt. There's a gentle pressure on her shoulder.

"Akamatsu, hey, Akamatsu, can you look at me?"

She lifts her head up slowly to see Rantaro and Tsumugi both giving her worried looks. She spots that it's Rantaro's hand on her shoulder. He gives it a squeeze.

"Hey, did you suddenly feel sick too when I opened the door?" Rantaro asks in an almost knowingly voice, as if he's also feeling the same way as she is right now. If he is then he's doing a better job at hiding it.

Kaede nods. "I-I'm sorry. I'm not sure what came over me. I've never even been in this room before but as soon as I saw inside..."

"You became overwhelmed?" Rantaro asks. "I feel the same way. As soon as I saw inside I just felt like something bad was going to happen."

Tsumugi looks upset. "I'm sorry but I don't know what either of you are on about..."

"It's fine, Shirogane," Kaede says as Rantaro helps her up from the floor, "I think we're both just winding ourselves up."

“We might as well give this room a miss anyway,” Rantaro says. “If someone was inside then they would’ve heard us by now.”

Did I really make that much noise? Probably not. I think Rantaro just meant that if someone heard someone panicking then they probably would’ve gone to see if the person was okay. It’s just really strange. Why would I be scared of a library of all places? It’s not like books are scary. And I haven’t even been down here before! Then again, Rantaro is looking really pale right now too. Why are we both scared of the same room? Perhaps the two of us have been here before and just don’t remember it? After all, when I woke up here I felt like I had forgotten something important...

Tsumugi offers to open up the next door, which reveals a games room. However, there’s no people inside. When they check the room in the back, which turns out to be a room with a projector and DVDs, they find that it is empty too.

“So it looks like no one is in the basement,” Rantaro says. “Although the basement would be the last place I’d go in a situation like this on my own.”

“I agree,” Tsumugi says with a nod. “People who go down into basements all by themselves are just asking to be killed.”

They all rush back upstairs a little too quickly. At least Kaede feels a little more calm now that she’s out of the basement. She has no idea why she had felt so panicked when Rantaro had opened the door to the library.

I felt a mixture of both panic and guilt. But why would I feel guilty in the first place? I haven’t done anything wrong...right?

Tsumugi grabs a hold of her hand as they head back upstairs and Kaede thinks that Tsumugi is trying to be nice when she marches her down to the room with the piano keys on the door. Tsumugi pushes the door open and Kaede’s heart flutters. There’s a piano!

Kaede all but dashes towards the piano and looks over it with awe. “It’s so beautiful...”

“Glad to see that you’re looking a little brighter now,” Rantaro says with a smile as he leans against the door frame, not stepping into the room like Tsumugi had done. “And it’s certainly lucky that there’s a room like this for you here too.”

“Is it really luck though?” Tsumugi murmurs before shaking her head. “Never mind! Hey, Akamatsu? You’ll have to play me a song later on, okay? I’d really love to hear you play!”

“Absolutely!” Kaede says as she pumps her fists. She looks at the piano regretfully. “But for now we still have people to find. But I’ll totally play a song for you later when things calm down!”

“I can’t wait!”

They all explore the classrooms but find that there’s no students in sight. The three of them reach the hallway that Kaede had suggested they’d go down before. Kaede frowns.

“What’s wrong?” Tsumugi asks as she tilts her head to the side. “Don’t you want to explore?”

“I can’t help but feel like this hallway shouldn’t be here,” Kaede admits.

“I kind of get what she means,” Rantaro agrees. “However, my tablet’s map shows this area so maybe it’s just my mind playing tricks on me?”

“The map!” Kaede pulls out her own tablet, suddenly feeling stupid. She should’ve brought it out sooner to look at. She flicks her tablet on and looks down at her map. “Huh?”

“What’s wrong?” Tsumugi tilts her head to the side.

“My map...doesn’t show this area,” Kaede says as she shoves a finger towards the hallway. “It only shows the bottom floor, the basement and outside.”

Rantaro looks like he wants to punch himself. “O-Oh?”

“Why would your map be different to mine?” Kaede asks. “Hey, let me have a look at it-”

“How about we look at mine instead?” Tsumugi suggests abruptly, pulling out her own tablet. Kaede raises an eyebrow whilst Rantaro looks a little too relieved. She opens up her own map. “Hey, mine also shows the entire academy too. Maybe yours is glitched right now, Akamatsu? It was glitching out before, remember?”

“That’s right,” Kaede says, although she can’t help but feel like something is off right now. “But still, it’s kind of annoying that only mine is broken right now.”

“Don’t worry, Akamatsu,” Tsumugi says as she holds out her tablet. “You can borrow mine whilst we look around. I don’t mind!”

“Really? Thank you so much!” Kaede happily puts her own tablet away and holds onto Tsumugi’s. She makes sure to be extra careful with it, holding it lightly but firmly in her hands. Tsumugi’s tablet reveals a much bigger map of the academy, showing several floors that weren’t on Kaede’s tablet. Maybe it was as Tsumugi said, maybe Kaede’s tablet is glitching out at the moment?

Rantaro looks like he wants to say something before shaking his head. He does however frown a little at Tsumugi but doesn’t say anything. “Maybe we should hurry up a little? I don’t like the thought of someone being alone in a situation like this.”

The first room they find is one full of cleaning products. There’s also a table set up which is surrounded by dolls. Kaede finds the set up elegant but also creepy at the same time. Kaede then also remembers that there’s a maid outside and that she would probably love this room if she saw it.

Hey, there’s some sort of pattern going on here. First there was that room full of magic stuff and then there was a room with a piano. Now there’s a room full of cleaning stuff. It’s almost as if there’s a room for everyone here. But why? And how are there so many rooms related to us? It can’t be a coincidence, right?

The school feels a little colder as they explore further inside. They find another room that’s full of bugs a little later on. No one is brave enough to stay inside the room for that long. They all leave and head up another set of stairs.

Kaede follows the map to the next room, which seems a little more isolated than the rest. The door is red and looks rather menacing, which causes Kaede to feel nervous in turn. She opens up the door and almost drops her tablet in surprise when she spots what’s inside.

“H-Huh?!” Kaede can only stare. There’s weapons everywhere. Knives, guns, grenades, axes, chainsaws...

Maybe the rules are real after all. There wouldn’t be a room like this otherwise, right? But if I’m right when I thought that there’s a room here designed for everyone then...is this also someone’s

room? If so then that would mean they're a very dangerous person. I need to find them as soon as possible so they can't hurt anyone! But what should I do about this room? Wait, crap! The people still inside of the school might've already seen this room and know about it! Arrgh! I don't know what to do!

"Who would've thought there would be a room like this," Rantaro says as he peers around, eyes narrowed. "Now then, this certainly isn't ideal at all. Hopefully no one else has been inside and has taken something already. It would put the rest of us at a major disadvantage if that's the case."

"Perhaps it's for the best that we tell everyone about this room then?" Tsumugi suggests. "So everyone is on guard if we do have to stay here until we can find an exit?"

"Maybe that is for the best," Rantaro says. "Hey, Akamatsu, what do you think?"

"I...yeah," Kaede agrees. "We should at least warn everyone about the room. I'm just worried that someone has already potentially taken something from here and is hiding it..."

"There's no use worrying about that for now," Rantaro reassures her. "I'm sure you've realised it too. The people inside of this school have probably seen this room by now too so there's no point in trying to conceal it. That would probably make people more curious anyway."

"Things are plainly getting worse," Tsumugi says with a sigh. "And we still haven't found more people yet..."

"Well from the looks of the map this school is pretty big," Kaede tells her. "And maybe some people are hiding."

"From us? But we aren't scary!" Tsumugi says with wide eyes. "Are we scary? I can't be scary! I'm just plain!"

"It could be that some people saw the rules just after waking up and decided to hide," Rantaro points out. "Or perhaps they're exploring like us. At least we have the Report Cards to show us who we need to look for anyway. That way we'll know if anyone is potentially missing and look for them if needed."

"That's...that's right," Kaede says with a nod, clenching her fists to her side. She takes a deep breath before letting it back out. "This situation is only scary if we make it scary. Nothing bad has happened just yet so for now it's better to presume that all of this is just one big crazy prank and we'll all be able to go home soon."

"I agree, let's think like that," Tsumugi says with a smile. "Now, let's explore even...huh?"

"What's up?" Rantaro asks.

Tsumugi pulls a face as she points a finger and starts to whisper. "I think someone is watching us!"

Following Tsumugi's finger reveals a small figure at the end of the hallway. They haven't bothered hiding themselves so they're in plain sight. However there's a couple of things that surprise Kaede. Firstly, how boldly they're standing. Either they haven't seen the rules or they don't care about them. Secondly, how small they are. Kaede pulls a face.

"Is that...a kid?" Kaede whispers, scared that if she speaks any louder then she'll scare them off. It suddenly feels like someone is squeezing inside of her chest. *There seriously can't be a kid here too, right? Who the hell would put a kid in a situation like this?! I-I need to see if they're okay!*

The small figure tilts their head to the side as they look at the three people quietly.

“H-Hey!” Kaede calls out nervously. *Ew, why did my voice go all high? I’m talking to a child, not a dog! They’re probably going to feel insulted now!* “Please don’t be scared. We’re friendly! Have you been alone this entire time?”

The figure tilts their head to the other side. They don’t seem phased at all.

“We won’t hurt you!” Kaede continues, crouching down encouragingly. She feels a little stupid. “How about you join us so we can keep you safe? I’m sure your parents are worried about you right now so-” Kaede’s eyes go wide when the figure starts to walk away, shaking their head. “H-Hey wait a second!”

She runs after them but by the time she reaches the corner they’re out of sight.

Wow, they must be fast! I have no clue where they went!

“Why did they run off like that?” Kaede asks with a pout. “I was only trying to look after them!”

“Hey, uh, Akamatsu?” Rantaro suddenly says as he points at his tablet. “I don’t think you were talking to a kid.”

“Huh?!”

“Oh, that’s definitely the same person,” Tsumugi adds with a hum. “His name is...Kokichi Ouma! From the looks of it he must be the same age as all of us.”

Kaede’s face starts to burn as she slaps her hands over her cheeks. “And I just spoke to him as if he was five!”

Tsumugi starts to giggle, ducking her head down when Kaede shoots her a withering glare. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry! It’s just sort of funny, you know?”

“He must feel so insulted!” Kaede wails. “He’s going to hate me...”

“It was an accident,” Rantaro reassures her before his expression turns more serious. “Although I don’t like the thought of someone as small as him being alone. I know splitting up is a stupid idea but I want to go and look for him. Will you both be okay if I take a look around for him?”

“Yeah, I think so,” Kaede says, although a small part of her starts to worry. She’s not sure she’s strong enough to fight someone off if they were to attack her or Tsumugi.

Rantaro suddenly starts to ruffle her hair. “Hey, I wouldn’t worry too much if I were you. With how you reacted when you first saw me you’ll have no problem scaring people off if you need to.”

“Or you could just call them a child and insult them so much that they leave,” Tsumugi giggles as Kaede groans.

“We both should be fine,” Kaede says as she tries to will away the redness from her cheeks. “But if you don’t find Ouma then just wait for us both outside where Momota told us to go, okay?”

“No problem, Akamatsu,” Rantaro responds. “And if something does happen then I give you permission to shout as loud as you want this time. At least I’ll actually know you’re in trouble.”

Kaede and Tsumugi both watch as Rantaro leaves, chuckling to himself.

“You’re pouting,” Tsumugi teases with a smile as Kaede looks back down at the tablet. “I really wouldn’t worry so much, Akamatsu. It’s probably not the first time it’s happened to Ouma. Besides, it’s not like he said anything either!”

“Probably because I embarrassed him so much!” Kaede grumbles. “A-And he didn’t even try to talk to us! What if I’ve made him wary of everyone from now on?! W-We all need to stick together in a situation like this!”

“You really are worrying too much,” Tsumugi insists with a smile, “how about you apologise to him when we see him next then? Would that make you feel better?”

“Maybe,” Kaede says before sighing. “Come on, there’s one more room I want to check out before going onto the next floor.”

They both walk along to what seems to be a room with a giant tennis court. What’s better is that there’s someone inside. They’re warily looking at all the tennis equipment, biting down on what seems to be a mock cigarette.

“O-Oh! Akamatsu, we’ve finally found someone!” Tsumugi cheers as she clasps her hands together. “And what’s your name?”

The small figure looks up at them before sighing. “Ryoma Hoshi.”

“And um…” Tsumugi blinks at Ryoma’s blunt response. “By any chance are you an Ultimate? Everyone else we’ve met here has been one!”

Ryoma looks to the side. “I used to be the Ultimate Tennis Pro.”

“Used to?” Kaede’s face goes soft. “Did you lose your title or something?”

“Hmm, something like that,” Ryoma responds. “But I no longer use that title anymore.”

He no longer calls himself an Ultimate? It seems that it’s more likely that he is still an Ultimate but doesn’t want to be one. I wonder why that is? I thought every Ultimate loved their talent!

“Hey, have you met anyone else here yet?” Tsumugi asks, swiftly changing the topic. It seems she’s quickly caught onto how uncomfortable Ryoma feels about talking about his talent.

Ryoma nods and gestures his head towards the door. “There’s a girl and a robot inside of some computer room upstairs. You’ll probably hear them as soon as you go onto the next floor, the girl is pretty loud.”

“Anyone else?” Kaede asks.

“There’s a tall guy inside of this room full of artefacts. Last I saw of him he was being told off by a girl with long pigtails. I honestly don’t know what the guy did but the girl didn’t seem to like him for whatever reason,” Ryoma says before crunching down on his sweet cigarette.

“They’re arguing?” Kaede repeats worriedly. “I hope-”

“You worried about the rules?” Ryoma says as he pulls out his own tablet. “You’ve both seen them, right? I wouldn’t worry about the girl too much. She didn’t look like she was about to kill someone. After all, a murderer should be able to tell good people from bad.”

“Huh?” Kaede’s eyes go wide. Did he just out himself as a murderer?! But he doesn’t seem like the

type...

"I can already hear you thinking," Ryoma sighs before tugging on his hat. "I have no intention of killing anyone here before you ask. What happened involving me was a completely different situation. However, I'd understand if you're wary of me."

"I'm not..."

Ryoma scoffs. "There's no point in lying either. Besides, I'm used to getting looks from people. Can't say I blame them either."

"Um..." Tsumugi shuffles just a little closer to Kaede. "By the way, did you see anyone else?"

"There was this small guy who was in here a couple of minutes ago," Ryoma admits. "He didn't really have much to say, can't tell if he's shy or just observing people."

Kaede bites her tongue long enough to not groan. "No one else?"

"If you're talking about the three people with the glitched icons then no, I haven't seen them," Ryoma says before frowning. "Although I am pretty curious about those three myself. We'll have to talk to them once they're found. I have a few questions I'd like to ask them myself."

"How about you join us then?" Kaede asks, ignoring Tsumugi's panicked look she shoots her. "I'm not comfortable leaving you on your own-"

Ryoma tugs his hat down even further. "Is that so?"

"Wait, I-I didn't mean it like that!" Kaede quickly becomes flustered as she tries to explain herself. "It's just that I don't want anyone to be alone at the moment. If the rules are true then...it's probably safer if everyone knows where everyone else is, yeah? I'm not trying to single you out too. It's just in a situation like this..."

"I've got to give it to you, kid," Ryoma says as he shoves his hands into his pocket. "You certainly are a sharp one. Just try not to stand out too much. We don't know who the hell is responsible for putting us here but it's best we all just keep our heads down for now."

"I..." Kaede swallows. *I didn't think about standing out too much...crap. Ryoma has a point that I might get myself into trouble if I start making myself stand out too much from everyone else. I just want everyone to be safe.*

"I'll join you for now," Ryoma says. "Even if it is to make you feel better."

"I-I'm not scared of you!" Kaede desperately tries to argue. She knows Ryoma doesn't really believe her.

Tsumugi goes back to latching onto her arm as they head upstairs. Ryoma leads them first to the room with the tall guy and the angry girl. Kaede takes a good look at the two.

The tall guy is wearing a lot of green and has glossy black hair that runs down his back smoothly. He is also wearing a mask that covers half of his face, giving him a very mysterious look to him. His golden eyes also seem to twinkle under the light.

The angry girl has an usual hairstyle. Kaede wonders how it actually works. There's also a green bow in her hair. Her outfit is mostly blue, although she does have a pink choker around her neck with a small little bell on it.

“Tenko is being serious!” The girl shouts. “You better not do anything to hurt any girls here! Tenko knows what degenerates like you are capable of.”

“Aren’t you being a little too judgemental?” The guy responds calmly. “After all it was you who burst into this room and started yelling at me for little to no reason, correct?”

“I’m just making sure that every single *men-ace* here knows their place,” the girl says with a huff. When she spots Kaede and Tsumugi, her eyes go wide and sparkly. “O-Oh! Tenko didn’t notice you both until now!”

The tall guy seems to be relieved that the girl, presumably called Tenko, has stopped yelling at him. He rubs his forehead with a pained look. “Finally...”

“Tenko is so glad that she’s finally found some more girls!” Tenko says as she furiously shakes Kaede’s hand before moving onto Tsumugi. “I’m Tenko Chabashira, the Ultimate Aikido Master! If either of you have any issues with any of the boys here then be sure to give Tenko a shout!”

“And I’m Korekiyo Shinguji, the Ultimate Anthropologist,” Korekiyo says as he takes a step forward. “I assure you that I’m not a bad person despite what first impressions may suggest.”

“No one asked,” Tenko says with a growl as she puts her hands on her hips, giving Ryoma a very strange look. “You! You were here before! You better not have upset either of these two because Tenko has already given you a warning!”

“Yeah, yeah,” Ryoma grumbles, looking like he wants to be anywhere else but in this room.

However, to Kaede’s surprise, Tenko’s expression softens. “However, after knowing what Tenko knows she trusts you enough to know your place. Tenko is very grateful that Hoshi told her about his, um, past.”

“It’s something I’d rather explain myself than people finding out in a different way,” Ryoma says. “Besides, I’m sure no one would trust me if they found out about me after reading the rules on the tablet too.”

“Now those rules are rather peculiar,” Korekiyo says. “However, is it just me or does it feel like we weren’t supposed to know about these rules yet? I get the feeling that there’s someone running this game but haven’t made themselves known yet. After all, how could they expect us to even want to think about killing each other for no reason? I doubt anyone is going to follow these rules without knowing why they’ve been put in place.”

“You do make a good point,” Tsumugi agrees. “Things do feel a little...unorganised right now.”

“Tenko just thinks everything is one big joke!” Tenko declares. “And that some menace has done this because they think they’re so funny! Tenko has a couple of new moves she’d like to try on the person behind all of this once she meets them.”

So Tenko thinks that the entire game is one big joke too, huh? I can’t help but feel the same way. Or maybe I’m just hoping that all of this is one big joke. I want to go home soon and be with my family again. I want to see my sister. I want...I want my mum and dad.

Kaede smiles as wide as she can as she gets everyone’s attention. “There’s still two people I would like to find. I would also like to say that there’s a group of people outside waiting for us and I’d like us all to go down and meet them together. If it’s possible could we all get the final two people together and then head downstairs as a group? I’d be really uncomfortable if we were all to split up right now.”

“Very well...” Korekiyo looks at Kaede expectantly.

“Oh! It’s Kaede Akamatsu, the Ultimate Pianist!”

“Very well then, Akamatsu,” Korekiyo says.

It’s Ryoma who takes the group to the computer lab and as he had told Kaede and Tsumugi, everyone can hear the sound of a girl cackling as they head towards it. The sound only intensifies as Ryoma opens the door.

“Whoever made this computer is a fucking genius!” A girl with wild blonde hair rubs her hand up and down a computer excitedly. “But not as smart as me! I’m the one and only gorgeous girl genius and anyone who says otherwise can get fucked!”

“I-Iruma, must you use that sort of language? A robot stands to the side, looking rather uncomfortable. However, their eyes light up when they see that new people have entered the room. “O-Oh! More people! It’s a pleasure to meet-”

“Haah?” The girl dangles a hand out in front of herself. “What’s with the large group? Are you all planning to have a big fucking orgy or some shit? I’m not sure how waterproof this computer is but-”

“T-That is disgusting! Of course we haven’t come here to do...t-that,” Kaede argues as she crosses her arms. This has to be the worst first impression of someone ever.

“Hee! Why the fuck are you judging me!” The girl whimpers before growling. “Besides, why the hell should I worry about a girl who has udders for tits?! Go and occupy your mouth with something else if you’ve just come in here to yell at me!”

“Um...” Tsumugi takes a gentle step back, a soft hand on Kaede’s elbow as she encourages her to follow. “Maybe we should leave-”

“I’ve come in here to introduce myself and to keep everyone safe!” Kaede yells back. “Have you even checked your tablet?! Something weird is going on and I don’t have time to deal with you and your attitude!”

The girl looks like she’s going to cry. “Fucking hell, calm down...just because you have udder tits doesn’t mean you actually have to act like a cow...”

“Tenko usually doesn’t yell at other women but she thinks you’re being very rude right now!” Tenko steps in. “Apologise to Akamatsu now!”

“But why?!”

“Please just ignore her,” says the robot with a defeated expression. “It’s easier to deal with her that way.”

Kaede feels sorry for the robot. How long have they been dealing with this girl for? She tries to cheer them up and welcome them into her steadily growing group. “Hi! I’m Kaede Akamatsu, the Ultimate Pianist! It’s very nice to meet you!”

The robot looks excited as they put two hands to their hips. “Fufufu! It’s very nice to meet you too! I am K1-B0 but please, call me Kiibo! I am the Ultimate Robot!”

“Did you just say you’re the Ultimate Penis?!” The girl starts to laugh even louder. Kaede feels a

headache start to grow. How can someone be crying one minute and laughing the next?

“Pianist!” Kaede shouts back, feeling flustered. “Pi-an-ist!”

“Oh, well that’s boring,” the girl sighs. “It’s nowhere as impressive as my talent! Clear your ears out because I’m only going to tell you virgins who I am once! I’m the one and only gorgeous girl genius, Miu Iruma! I’m the Ultimate Inventor so you should all start grovelling on your knees right now and be begging for me to make something that will get us all out of here!”

“If you can make something to get us out of here then you should make it without us begging,” Kaede says with a frown. “After all, you won’t be able to leave too if you don’t make something.”

“Fucking smartass,” Miu hisses. “Who the hell decided you were in charge anyway?”

“No one is in charge,” Korekiyo tells her. “However, it is in all our best interests if we group up together now so if things do get dangerous then we can handle things more professionally.”

Miu goes oddly silent before crossing her arms. “You’re on about the rules, right? If any of you fuckers even think about touching me my foot with be shoved so far up your asses that-”

“Guys, we need to stop this!” Kaede shouts, giving Miu a very pointed look, causing her to shrink in on herself. “Listen, we’re all in the same situation right now and I get that people act differently when they feel threatened but for now I think we’re all on the same page of not wanting to hurt each other. When whoever put us in this school reveals themselves we need to put up a united front against them! If we start squabbling like this then they’ll have already won!”

“Well said, Akamatsu,” Kiibo says with a very pleased look. “Now, what should we do next?”

“There’s another group outside that we’re going to meet up with,” Kaede explains. “I think everyone has been found but I do quickly want to check the top floor for more people just in case. I’ll...take Shirogane and Chabashira with me whilst the rest of you head downstairs and outside please. There will be a guy called Momota waiting outside for you all.”

“He’s very purple,” Tsumugi adds.

“Yes, he’s very purple.”

“I see,” Korekiyo says. “Very well then, it seems our next destination is outside. However, is it smart to break up like this so soon?”

“I trust Shirogane and Chabashira,” Kaede says. “And I trust that you can all manage walking downstairs without killing each other.”

“Don’t worry, Akamatsu! I will make sure that everyone behaves as we go outside!” Kiibo tells her. It seems that Kiibo is one of the few sensible people here. Kaede feels rather relieved that he’s around.

“Thanks Kiibo,” Kaede says. “Now c’mon, Shirogane, Chabashira. I want to be quick.”

A quick scan around the current floor reveals that there's also an art room but that’s it.

The final staircase reveals a colder looking floor with marble floors and glass walls. The three girls look around in awe.

“You know, this kind of feels like a final area you’d unlock in a game,” Tsumugi admits as she

clasps her hands together. "It's very...different from the rest of the academy. Clean."

"Tenko didn't really spend much time up here because those statues freaked her out," Tenko admits as she points to a stone statue of a strange looking bear. "They still do. Maybe we should be quick about searching for the others? Who are we looking for again anyway?"

"There's three students glitched out on the tablets," Kaede explains as she uses Tsumugi's tablet to show Tenko the students.

"Hmm..." Tenko rubs her chin. "Tenko finds it weird that it says they've all graduated. The rules said people can only graduate if they've killed someone and win a class trial? Tenko doesn't really understand it herself but..."

Kaede's blood goes cold. "I never read that far into the rules..."

"Oh! Tenko never meant to scare you," Tenko says. "Maybe Tenko got it wrong too. Two of the three students we're looking for are girls too so Tenko knows she has to be wrong! None of them are killers! Well, that's what Tenko thinks anyway!"

"Besides, we've seen everyone else that are on the tablet," Tsumugi adds as she tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. "So they couldn't have killed any other student here."

"Tenko also read that there's a headmaster too but we haven't seen them around..." Tenko pauses. "Maybe they killed them and that's how they graduated?"

"I'm not sure what to think," Kaede admits. "For now, I just want to check this floor to see if they're here. If they're not up here then maybe they're not at the school at all and really have graduated."

They find a room full of clothes that leaves Tsumugi excited as she points out she can try on lots of different cosplay outfits. Both Kaede and Tenko promise that they'll wear some too.

The next room leaves Kaede feeling sick. It seems to be a study of sorts. What worries her the most is the giant cabinet full of poison in the corner.

First there's the room full of weapons and now this?! Geez, I really don't know how to deal with this anymore. At least there's lots of antidotes too. Maybe I should try and push all the poisons to the back of the cupboard for now and leave the antidotes at the front?

The last room leaves the three girls baffled. The room is cast in a deep red colour with picture frames dangling from the ceiling. There's also a red line that bounces around the room. On the back wall is also a giant safe that Kaede doesn't even want to try and touch at the moment.

"I really don't understand this room," Tsumugi admits as she pushes her glasses up against her nose. "It's a little confusing, don't you think?"

"Tenko is also very confused," Tenko agrees. "We should bring everyone else up here later and get them to solve the puzzle!"

"Hmm..." Kaede feels bad for not listening but she's too preoccupied. So the three mysterious students weren't in here either. She looks down at Tsumugi's tablet one last time, staring at the three strangers intensely.

Despite searching throughout a large majority of the school, Shuichi Saihara, Maki Harukawa and Himiko Yumeno are nowhere to be found.

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 1 Part 2

Going back outside only reminds Kaede of the large glass wall that surrounds the school they're currently trapped in. She frowns at it and wonders momentarily how long it would take to shatter the glass herself.

Shattering the glass doesn't sound like a smart idea though. I wouldn't want anyone to get hurt if the entire wall caved in on itself. Maybe breaking down the wall isn't the smartest idea. But still, it really sucks that it's there. It makes me feel trapped. I wonder if everyone else feels the same way?

To her surprise neither Tenko or Tsumugi leave her side as they all head outside. It makes Kaede feel protected. Stronger. United. She swallows. *I know Korekiyo said that there's no leader but I wonder...maybe I ask if everyone wants one? I'm not sure if I'd be a good leader myself but I always feel safer when I know there's someone I can turn to when I need help. Kaito might be a good leader since he's so optimistic. I could also ask the Ultimate Maid if she could consider leading the group too since I bet she'd be really good at it!*

It's a pleasant temperature outside. Outside of the glass the sun is shining brightly. However, the air doesn't seem humid. Although now that Kaede thinks about it she can't feel a breeze, which is slightly unusual since there's always some sort of breeze outside usually, even on the hottest of days.

She spots everyone else sitting by the gazebo. A couple of people are sitting on some benches whilst some others are standing around, talking to each other in small groups. Kaede spots Rantaro talking to a tall girl with short hair. Her dress is dark and elegant looking. Kaede thinks that the girl must be the Ultimate Maid.

Rantaro waves her over and Kaede happily obliges, Tenko and Tsumugi both still by her side.

"Akamatsu, glad to see you're doing okay," Rantaro says before smiling at the other two girls. "And Shirogane! And...um..."

"Tenko Chabashira," Tenko bluntly responds before huffing. "Tenko doesn't know who you are but you better not cause any trouble for any of the girls!"

"Oh, I..." Rantaro gives Kaede a helpless look. She laughs. "I'll make sure to be on my best behaviour then?"

"Tenko hopes so..."

Thankfully the elegant looking girl intervenes. "With you three here then that means that almost the entire group is outside. However there's still no sign of the three students with the glitched profiles. How concerning..."

"I honestly don't think that they're here," Kaede tells her truthfully. "I've checked most of the school but they're nowhere in sight."

"I see," the girl says as she puts a hand to her chin. "The tablet did also mention that those three students have graduated. However, I can't help but think that the word graduated is being used in a completely different context."

"That does make sense," Tsumugi agrees before pointing a finger up. "However, I personally think that those students have left the school somehow. Perhaps they all managed to find an exit?"

“And they just left us behind?” Tenko frowns. “Tenko doesn’t like the thought of that.”

“We should wait until we get more information before theorising perhaps,” the girl says before bowing ever so slightly. “I would also like to apologise for not introducing myself sooner. I’m Kirumi Tojo, the Ultimate Maid. It’s a pleasure to meet you all.”

“So you’re the Ultimate Maid,” Kaede murmurs before smiling. “It’s nice to meet you too!”

“Hey, Amami?” Tsumugi asks. “Did you end up finding the small student?”

Rantaro rubs the back of his head. “No, I didn’t. However, Tojo just told me that he was spotted going into the dormitories a couple of minutes ago. Momota’s trying to get him to come out as we speak.”

“I’ve spotted him going in and out of the dormitories a couple of times myself,” Kirumi admits. “I’m not really sure what he’s up to.”

“Dormitories?” Kaede ponders out loud. “Why are there dormitories? I certainly don’t plan to stay here long enough to need a bedroom!”

“But if we do have to stay here overnight then at least we’ll have somewhere to go,” Tsumugi points out. “Hopefully there’ll be enough rooms for everyone.”

“Actually there are,” Kirumi informs her before frowning. “There’s sixteen rooms in total but what’s strange is that each door has a picture of each of us above them. Whoever brought us here clearly knows who we all are.”

“Tenko finds that concerning,” Tenko says as she crosses her arms. “Tenko certainly doesn’t remember signing up to go to this school or anything. In fact, Tenko doesn’t really remember what she was doing before she woke up here!”

“Actually, now that I think about it...” Rantaro pulls a face. “I don’t remember what I was doing either...”

“M-Maybe we’ve all been kidnapped?” Tsumugi asks with a small tremble in her voice.

Kaede grits her teeth. It’s more likely than not that Tsumugi’s right. Clearly no one knows what’s going on or how they ended up here. However, what confuses Kaede the most is that the school has clearly been set up for them too. If the dormitories already have rooms prepared for them then...

There’s also the several rooms that are coincidentally full of stuff that suit our talents. I’m starting to think that maybe the room with the piano was actually made for me? Then again it could just be a music room but then why is there only a piano inside? If it was a music room then there’d be way more instruments inside! There’s also the tennis room, the art room and the room full of cleaning equipment...

“I think that it’s in our best interests if we all sit down and discuss what we should do next as a group,” Kirumi says as she holds her hands together. “What do you say, Akamatsu?”

“Huh?” Kaede blinks before nodding. “Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. But shouldn’t we wait for Momota and the other guy?”

“I think they’re coming out now,” Rantaro tells her as he points towards the dormitories.

He's right. The small guy, presumably Kokichi, is walking out of the dormitories. However, he doesn't head towards the group but instead towards the school. Kaito is following behind him with a confused look on his face.

"H-Hey!" Kaede calls out. "Where are you both going?"

"We're just going to grab something!" Kaito tells her, almost tripping up the steps at the entrance of the school as he does so. "We'll just be a second!"

"Okay?" Kaede tilts her head to the side in confusion. "I wonder what they're getting?"

"We'll find out soon enough," Rantaro reassures her. "Now how about we join up with everyone else? There's still a few people you need to meet."

He's right. When Kaede glances over at the bench that is under the gazebo she spots two people she doesn't recognise. One is a very small girl wearing a yellow raincoat. She's currently spinning what looks to be a paintbrush around in her hand. The other person is large and intimidating at first glance. However, what surprises Kaede is the childish expression he's wearing as he listens to the small girl talk to him.

She approaches the two cautiously, feeling comforted that neither Tenko or Tsumugi have yet left her side yet.

The small girl waves happily at the trio when she spots them, her platinum blonde hair bouncing up and down along with her movement.

"Yoohoo!" The girl greets the two with a smile. "Kaito told me that he met some of you before! My name is Angie Yonaga and I'm the Ultimate Artist!"

"And Gonta's name is Gonta Gokuhara! Gonta is Ultimate Entomologist!" Gonta says before shrinking in on himself. "Gonta knows Gonta look scary so Gonta is very happy that you all approached him first! Usually people run away when they see Gonta!"

"People run away from you?" Kaede asks in surprise.

Even though he definitely looks intimidating it seems that he's actually a really nice person. He's the definition of a gentle giant! Angie also seems really friendly too. I'm actually relieved that everyone I've met so far seems nice enough. I was sort of worried that some people would be hard to deal with but thankfully that doesn't seem the case. I'm only wary of Miu at the moment but she seems to be putting on some act. Maybe she just doesn't want to show people how vulnerable she feels in a situation like this?

"Gonta used to it," Gonta admits before a light blush covers his cheeks, "but so many people approach Gonta today so Gonta is really happy! Gonta thinks he's on the right track to becoming a true gentleman!"

"And what do you mean by that?" Tenko asks, narrowing her eyes. "You better not have ulterior motives!"

"O-Of course Gonta doesn't have any ul-tee-ri-or motives!" Gonta cries out in distress. "Gonta want to make family proud by becoming a true gentleman! Gonta want to help both men and ladies! When Gonta woke up he helped everyone to try and find an exit but Gonta could not find one!"

"I wouldn't worry too much about that," Tsumugi says softly. "If there is an exit then I don't think

it's going to be in plain sight."

"Oh, that's a relief!" Gonta smiles. "So if exit is not in sight then do we all need to close our eyes to find it?"

"That sounds like a divine idea!" Angie agrees as she closes her eyes and clasps her hands together. "Angie will also ask her God to help her too! He's currently napping at the moment but he'll wake up soon!"

"Um, I don't think..." Tsumugi laughs awkwardly before deflating. "Never mind..."

Ah, it seems that Gonta might not be the sharpest tool in the shed. At least he's trying! Angie confuses me a little though...although I guess it's not my place to judge her or anything! They both do seem like genuinely nice people! However, they both seem oddly optimistic right now. Did they not read the rules or something?

"Hey, um, guys?" Kaede asks. Angie and Gonta look at her expectantly. "Did you both see the rules on the tablet?"

"Gonta did read through them but..." Gonta's face turns an angry red. "Gonta would never hurt anyone so Gonta can't follow rules! Gonta knows that it's bad to break the rules but Gonta never hurt anyone! Ever!"

"And Angie doesn't believe in them either," Angie says with a peaceful smile. "If we all just ignore them then they won't have to apply to us!"

"I'm not sure that's how rules work," Tsumugi says before shaking her head. "But maybe you're right. If we ignore the rules then maybe..."

"Tenko doesn't want to worry anyone but there's a rule saying that if we break any of them then students will be exterminated," Tenko points out as she presses her fingers together nervously. "Whoever wrote these rules seems serious about us following them."

Exterminated?! We're not bugs! We're people! Whoever has trapped us here clearly thinks we're nothing but...but some play things they can throw away if we don't behave! Ugh, this is so frustrating. A part of me wants to completely ignore the rules but at the same time if we don't follow them then we all might be in danger! Argh!

"Akamatsu, please don't look so worried," Tsumugi suddenly says as she squeezes Kaede's hand. "I'm sure things will be okay. A-And if things aren't okay then I'm sure you'll be able to think of something to help everyone! You've been very helpful so far! You're kinda like a protagonist in a survival game or something!"

"That's right," Tenko agrees with a nod. "Akamatsu has been very calm from the start and has been making sure everyone is safe! We'll have nothing to worry about if you're around!"

Kaede's eyes widened. "I-Is that what you both seriously think?"

"Yeah!" Tsumugi grins. "Oh! Momota and Ouma are back! But...is that a whiteboard? I wonder where they got that from?"

"Most likely the warehouse," Kirumi answers as she joins the group. "I'll see if either of them need any assistance."

Angie's eyes shine brightly. "Wow, Kirumi is so considerate! She's almost acting like she's

everyone's mother!"

"But isn't she the same age as all of us?" Kaede ponders.

The pianist watches as Kirumi heads to the entrance of the school. However, to her surprise she spots Kokichi give Kirumi such a withering glare that it stops the maid in her tracks. Even Kaito seems a little surprised and Kaede sees his mouth open and close. Kirumi says something that Kaede doesn't hear and only Kaito responds to her. Kokichi simply continues to drag the large whiteboard over to the gazebo.

I can't tell if he's being rude or if he just doesn't like talking to people. However, why would he be rude towards Kirumi of all people? She seems really nice! Maybe I was wrong about there being no problematic people here. Although, if only Miu and Kokichi are going to be problems then that's only two people to deal with and I think I can handle that. Miu seems to back down easily but I'm not sure how Kokichi will react if I try to tell him off.

Kaito and Kirumi walk back to the gazebo together whilst Kokichi sets up the whiteboard by the bench. Kaede gets a better look at him. He's not as short as she thought he was. She's still sort of embarrassed about the earlier situation. She wants to apologize but she's not sure bringing up her mistake in front of everyone would be a good idea.

She silently encourages herself before approaching Kokichi, who is now walking away from the whiteboard and...where's he going now?!

Can this guy stay still for one second?! Geez!

"Hey, can we talk?" Kaede calls out to him.

He stops walking. It seems he was going to go back to the dormitories. Again. However, he still has his back to her.

Kaede feels her hands tremble. Why does she feel nervous all of a sudden? "Can you stand still for just one-" He completely ignores her, heading back into the dormitories. "Hey, I was talking to you!"

"What's wrong, Akamatsu?" Tenko asks as she heads over. "Is that degenerate ignoring you? Do you want Tenko to use her neo aikido on him? Because Tenko will!"

"No, it's fine," Kaede says with a pout, scratching the side of her head. "I just really don't get that guy..."

"He hasn't said much to be either if that makes you feel any better!"

"Eek!" Kaede jumps when Kaito suddenly appears beside her. "Momota, you've gotta stop scaring me like that! You just keep appearing out of thin air!"

"Whoops, my bad," Kaito responds sheepishly before pulling a face. "I really don't know what that guy is up to right now but his attitude is starting to piss me off. He's barely said a word to me! I mean, I get that he could be scared and ignoring people may be his way of coping but we're all in this situation together, you know? We can't start closing ourselves off from each other!"

"Let's just wait until he comes back before we start getting angry," Kaede tells him. "After all there might be some explanation to why he's acting this way."

"There better be," Kaito huffs. "Otherwise me and him are going to have a talk."

“He seems to be up to something though,” Tsumugi says, clasping her hands together down by her waist. “And I’m plainly curious to figure out what he’s figured out. Maybe he remembers something we don’t?”

“That could be the case,” Tenko responds before growling. “That degenerate better not be wasting our time though! We could be trying to find a way out right now!”

“Maybe that should be our next plan,” Kaito suggests, slamming his fists together. “There has to be an exit somewhere!”

Kokichi returns from the dormitories moments later with a heavy looking cardboard box in his arms. However, despite the weight of the box he doesn’t seem bothered by it and carries it over to the whiteboard easily. Kaede watches curiously as he starts to pull out what seems to be magnets, photographs and whiteboard pens from the box.

Hold on a second...those photographs are of us! I mean, it’s only our faces but why does he have them?! Is he a part of the game? I-I gotta know!

It’s Rantaro of all people who beats her first to ask Kokichi a question however. The green haired male raises an eyebrow as he picks up a photograph of himself. “Hey, why do you have these?”

“They were in my room,” Kokichi says. Kaede can’t help but feel irritated that Kokichi won’t talk to her but will talk to someone else. “Amami, right? Can you stand over there for me?”

“...sure?”

Rantaro stands to the side on his own. When his and Kaede’s eyes meet he gives her a small and confused shrug.

“What are you up to?” Kirumi asks Kokichi, wearing a puzzled expression. “Do you need any help?”

“You, stand over there,” Kokichi tells her as he points to a different area. He doesn’t even bother to look at Kirumi as he starts to pin the photographs onto the whiteboard.

“Hey, degenerate male!” Tenko shouts as she storms over furiously. “Don’t talk to Tojo like-”

“Could you stand next to Amami please?” Kokichi asks her as he pins Tenko’s photograph onto the whiteboard. Kaede watches as Tenko’s picture goes next to Rantaro’s.

Tenko opens and closes her mouth before snarling. “Why? What are you up to?! You do realise that you’re acting totally suspicious right now! Even more suspicious than a typical male would usually act! Tenko will not move until you tell her what’s going on!”

Kokichi pauses before answering. “I’m just weeding out some threats.”

“Threats?!” Tsumugi goes pale. “Are you saying that some of us are threats?!”

“You, stand over there,” Kokichi orders her and points to yet another small area. It seems that he’s putting people into groups.

Tsumugi hesitantly stands on her own, giving Kaede a sad look as she wraps her arms around herself.

“Hey Ouma? Aren’t you taking things a little too far?” Kaede asks him, trying her best not to sound

too condescending. However, she is worried about his behaviour and the implication behind his words. “All of us have literally just woken up here. If you’ve been awake for longer than us and know something then you really should tell everyone!”

“...Akamatsu, yes?” Kokichi responds. “Go and stand next to Tojo.”

He didn’t even say please! And what’s with these groups anyway? Is he grouping us up at random or is there something more to this? There seems to be three groups at the moment. Could it be that he’s putting us in groups based on who he thinks may be the biggest threats? This is so confusing! Why does he get to order us around anyway? A-And why are we all listening to him?!

There ends up being three groups in total.

Kaede’s group involves herself, Kirumi, Korekiyo and Gonta.

Rantaro’s group involves himself, Ryoma, Angie, Tenko and Miu.

Tsumugi’s group involves herself, Kaito and Kiibo.

“Hmm...” Kokichi stands back from the whiteboard with a frown. He’s put the photographs of people into the same groups on the whiteboard. However, there’s a fourth group too which consists of the three missing students. Kaede also notices that Kokichi’s photograph has yet to be put on the board too.

“Are you going to explain what’s going on?” Ryoma asks as he tugs his hat down and casts his face into darkness. “What’s with the groups?”

“Why have I been put with these losers?” Miu asks.

“And why is our group so small?” Kiibo questions. “There’s only three of us! If you’re going to make us do group activities then this isn’t fair.”

“Why would he make us do group activities?” Korekiyo responds, raising an eyebrow. “However, I am also curious as to why these groups have been put together. Are we all related to each other somehow perhaps?”

“Hey degenerate! You forgot your own picture!” Tenko points out.

Angie laughs. “If you don’t have a picture then Angie will happily draw you if you give her a pint of your blood!”

“Why aren’t you saying anything?” Kaede grumbles nervously. She can feel the hairs on her arms start to stand up. Something isn’t right here. It’s not like she doesn’t trust the people in her group but...why has Kokichi grouped them like this?

Kokichi uncaps a black whiteboard pen. The pen squeaks loudly against the whiteboard as he writes.

Kaede’s mouth feels dry when he starts to label the groups, starting with her own.

Failed Graduates

“H-Hey! Just what are you implying?!” Kaito instantly yells, his fist clenching. “Why would you write that?!”

Kokichi then labels Rantaro’s group.

Potential Victims

“Um, um, why is Angie being labelled as a potential victim?” Angie asks. “Angie knows her God will protect her!”

“And why am I being labelled as one too?!” Tenko demands. “Tenko knows neo aikido!”

Tsumugi’s group is labelled next.

Suspicious

“Why am I suspicious?!” Kiibo cries. “Are you being robophobic?! I’ll have you know I have a special recording device that allows me to record everything I hear! If you start making robophobic comments then-”

“Forget that!” Kaito shouts over the top of him. “Why am I suspicious!? If there's anyone suspicious here then it’s you, Ouma!”

Then, the three missing students are labelled.

Graduates

“So,” Kokichi says as he pops the pen lid back on. He turns around and faces the group with a smile that is way too cheeky for his own good. “Does anyone have any questions?”

The absolute nerve of this guy! How can he smile at us all like that even after putting us into those sorts of groups?! What the hell do they even mean anyway? Why have I been put in the failed graduates group?! I-I’ve never tried to kill anyone before in my life! And how would Kokichi know if I had anyway? I’ve never met him before!

“Of course I have several questions,” Kirumi responds with a grimace. “Why would you accuse my group of being failed graduates? As the rules would imply, becoming a graduate means that you’ve had to have killed someone and won a class trial.”

“Or perhaps just winning the game might be enough to become one too?” Kokichi adds before putting his hands behind his head. “But I didn’t put you in that group because I thought you four might be capable of winning the game. I put you all in that group because I’m preeeeetty certain you’ve all tried to kill before.”

One of Korekiyo’s eyes twitch. “And how would you know that?”

“A leader has a way of knowing these sorts of things,” Kokichi answers easily.

Kaede closes her eyes as she tries to will herself to calm down. Kokichi has all but implied that he thinks that herself and the rest of the people in her group are dangerous and have actually tried to kill before. However, Kaede knows that’s wrong. She would definitely remember trying to do something as evil as killing someone! Right? Right?!

“But why Gonta in this group?!” Gonta looks like he’s close to tears. “Gonta...Gonta never hurt anyone ever!”

“And why am I a potential victim?” Ryoma asks as he pulls out a sweet cigarette. “I told you about my past. Wouldn’t I be the biggest threat here?”

“Apparently not,” Kokichi tells him before turning to Gonta. “And as for you, Gonta, sometimes

people pretend to act nice and be your friend but deep down they might be a very horrible person. Are you a horrible person, Gonta?"

"Of course not! Gonta wants to become a true gentleman!" Gonta argues back. "If anyone is a horrible person here then it's you, Ouma! You shouldn't accuse people of being bad for no reason!"

"Especially if you have no proof," Kiibo adds. "And why are you saying that I'm suspicious? I'm starting to think that you really are robophobic!"

Kokichi shrugs his shoulders. "All robots are suspicious, Kiiboy."

"Well I'm not a robot," Tsumugi says. "So why am I in the group too?"

"Because you didn't fit into any other group," Kokichi tells her before putting a finger to his lips. "And you know, plain people are always suspicious! They always hide in the background and end up people the people who are pulling all the strings-"

"Well I'm certainly not plain," Kaito huffs. "Why am I in that group too?!"

"Becauseeeeeee..." Kokichi pauses. "You are!"

"That's not a god damn answer and you know it!"

"Why's your picture not on the board anyway?" Rantaro asks as he crosses his arms. He looks like an older brother scolding a younger sibling. "It's a little unfair to remove yourself from this situation, don't you think? Unless, of course, you're the one behind us being trapped here?"

"Ooh, finally, a smart question!" Kokichi pumps his fists as he grabs one more photograph from his box. "But you're totally wrong about me being the person behind the game. I think the one group I'd fit in the most is..."

Kokichi pins his picture alongside the other potential victims with a small frown.

"Like hell you're a victim," Miu growls. "Besides, are you fucking stupid? The victims completely outweigh the failed graduates now!"

"I know," Kokichi responds seriously. Kaede almost gets whiplash from the sudden change. "That's why I was thinking that maybe someone from the suspicious pile should also be put into the failed graduates but..."

"Now hold on a second!" Kaede yells and winces when everyone turns to face her. "Ouma, this isn't fair! W-We've all just literally woken up here at the same time! How could any of this even be possible? Even you must know that something's not right! You can't just go around accusing people of doing such...such horrible things like this without any proof!"

"Unless Kokichi does have proof?" Angie suddenly counters. "Because, um, well, Angie knows that someone wouldn't accuse everyone like this without a reason!"

"What Ouma is suggesting is that we've all potentially could've been in a game before," Rantaro says as he stares at his own picture on the whiteboard. "And maybe we just don't remember it. It would explain why we all couldn't remember much when we woke up here..."

"So what? Do you think someone has been messing with our memories?" Ryoma scoffs. "How is that even possible?"

“Because it’s not possible!” Tsumugi claims as she holds her hands to her chest. She looks like she’s about to cry as she shakes her head. “W-We all woke up here at the same time, right? A-And no one knew each other when we woke up too! The only suspicious person here right now is Ouma since he’s trying to...to frame people he doesn’t even know!”

“With the information Ouma is presenting...” Kirumi sticks a finger up in the air. “It would suggest that he’s either witnessed us all already participate in some sort of scenario where people have already tried or succeeded in killing each other. It’s also a little strange that he also seems to know us all too. However, there could also be the possibility that Ouma is involved with whoever kidnapped us and is doing this as a scare tactic to get us all to distrust each other.”

“And what use would that be?” Kokichi asks her before his face scrunches up. “Y-You guys are being really mean right now!”

“And you’re being plainly suspicious!” Tsumugi retorts as she thrusts a finger into his direction. “W-Wouldn’t revealing information like this right from the get go be boring? The people who put us here wouldn’t reveal so much information like this at once! S-So Ouma must be lying for some reason! He’s just trying to wind us all up and I don’t know why!”

Tsumugi suddenly seems really distressed. I think Kokichi is really upsetting her. Actually, I think he’s upsetting quite a few people. If he actually had some proof to back up his claims then maybe I’d believe him but for now he’s the one making himself look really suspicious. I-I know I shouldn’t think this but it’s getting really hard for me to trust him! I’m really angry that he’s trying to imply that I’ve tried to kill someone before too! Luckily I don’t think anyone believes him but...

“Let’s hold on a second,” Rantaro says as he holds out his hands in an attempt to calm everyone down. “I know this might upset a couple of people but for one moment how about we pretend that what he’s saying is true?”

“That’s easy for you to say,” Kaede argues. “You haven’t been put into a group like mine. I don’t even want to pretend for one second that I’ve potentially tried to kill someone!”

“But if we’re only pretending to accept that Ouma is right then...” Kiibo sighs. “Then maybe it is for the best to hear both him and Amami out.”

“Very well then,” Kirumi says with a very strained expression. “However, if I am to play along with this...claim then I’d also like Ouma to present some evidence as to why he would put us into these groups.”

“He’s actually not lying about one thing,” Angie cheers as she puts her hands above her head. “Because the graduated group is completely correct! Angie’s God told her so too!”

“Anyone who can fucking read can see that’s only the right group,” Miu huffs as she rolls her eyes. “The tablets literally say that those three have graduated!”

“But how would Ouma know about everyone else?” Ryoma asks. “Because until he shows us some proof-”

“I don’t really have any proof.”

Kaito’s face goes purple. “What the hell do you say?”

“I said I don’t have any proof,” Kokichi says before sighing in defeat. Kaede can’t help but notice that he’s looking a little...frustrated? “But when I said that I was weeding out threats that wasn’t a lie.”

“So you still think that...those four are dangerous?” Tenko asks as she gestures towards Kaede’s group. “Tenko cannot believe that!”

Tsumugi looks almost relieved as her shoulders start to slump. “And here I thought that all that you were going to ruin all the mystery solving fun!”

“You call this fun?” Ryoma sighs.

“Hey, Ouma, don’t you think you owe us all an apology?” Kaito suddenly demands. “Listen man, I don’t know what the hell is up with you but you can’t put us through shit like this! Especially not in a situation like this!”

“Eh, you want me to apologise?” Kokichi asks before his face twists into something sinister. “Why should I apologise for trying to keep myself safe? The only people who are going to be sorry in a situation like this are all of you for blindly believing in each other.”

Kaede feels something cold shoot down her spine. “Can you stop being dramatic for just a second? We’ve all just woken up and you playing...playing pranks like this isn’t going to help anyone! You’ve already tried to lie to us once-”

The pianist can feel her face turn red when Kokichi suddenly bursts out laughing, tears creeping into the corner of his eyes. “Oh I’m already starting to pity you, Akamatsu! If you’re not capable of telling a truth from a lie then there’s no way you’ll be able to get out of a situation like this alive! Then again, you’re probably dumb enough to try and kill someone to-”

“That’s enough!” Tenko cries. “Tenko gives you ten seconds to run before she’s coming after you!”

“Let’s try not to resort to violence!” Kiibo pleads as he takes a step forward. “We’ll never get anywhere if we all start to turn on each other now!”

“Well it’s his fault!” Kaito barks as he angrily points a finger at Kokichi. “He’s the one causing trouble when we’ve only been awake for like what, an hour at most?!”

“I agree, Ouma is causing nothing but trouble at the moment,” Korekiyo says as he closes his eyes. “But one such as him would also be rather interesting to observe too...”

“Now hold on a second everyone,” Rantaro says before sighing. “Listen, I’m not saying Ouma is right in any of this but I would like to ask him why he’s grouped us this way. I know he doesn’t have any proof but...”

“He certainly knows more than he’s letting on,” Ryoma grunts. “After all, the kid also had pictures of us all.”

“That’s gotta mean he’s involved with us all being here!” Tenko argues.

“Um, actually...” Kiibo presses his fingers together. “Ouma and I woke up inside of the same classroom. I woke up first and found him sleeping on a desk and I’m not trying to defend him or anything but it took me a while to wake him up. I do think he’s as much of a victim as the rest of us when it comes to being kidnapped.”

“Wow, Kiiboy! You totally got me out of a huge pickle there!” Kokichi cheers. “And as for me knowing so much I’ve gotta ask, did anyone even check to see what my talent is?”

His talent? Let’s see...ah! It says that he’s the Ultimate Supreme Leader. But I’m still a little

confused as to how that is even relevant. Unless we're all in his group or something? No, that can't be right either because there's no way I'd join a group run by him! You know, for being a leader he isn't really being a good one! Aren't leaders supposed to be someone you can go to for help? Kokichi is the last person I'd go to in a situation like this and I've only known him for like ten minutes!

"The Ultimate Supreme Leader," Korekiyo reads out from this tablet. "Now that certainly is an interesting talent."

"Since I'm a leader I should always be on top of absolutely everything," Kokichi says. "Which means as soon as I woke up I made sure to gather as much information on everyone here as possible! Now there's no doubt that the rules are pretty much true so you're all pretty naive to start making friends with each other now, you know? And I was even super nice enough to point out all the threats here so far! And this is the thanks I get? Tough crowd."

"But Gonta not know who Ouma is so Ouma shouldn't know who Gonta is either!" Gonta cries out. "So Ouma not know anything about Gonta at all! How could he put Gonta in a group like this if Ouma doesn't even know a single thing about Gonta!"

"The big guy has a point," Ryoma says slowly. "How'd you group us up anyway? Guess work? I suppose he could've just looked through the profiles and guessed what could happen to us based on those..."

"To be honest I don't really care about what you all think about me and my supposed guess work," Kokichi says as uses his fingers to make mock air quotes. "But man, I must be really unlucky to be stuck in a group like this! Even though I'm trying to help you all out you're all still being super mean to me! Especially you, Akamatsu!"

"M-Me?!" Kaede throws her hands up in surprise. "But I-"

"You spoke to me like I was some dog before!" Kokichi wails. "The absolute disrespect! Not only are you dangerous but you don't even respect anyone at all either!"

"No, that's wrong!" Kaede cries. "Okay, I mistook you for a child but I thought you were lost and needed some help! Y-You were the one who started ignoring me for no reason!"

"I mean, would you respond to someone if they were talking to you as if you were a dog?" Kokichi rolls his eyes. "Anyway, I'm bored of this conversation now. I'm not usually this generous buuuuuuuut I only like to play games that are fair, you know? It's not fair if killers get to hide their identity from others and get away with it."

"So if I hadn't told you about my past?" Ryoma prompts. "Would you have put me in with them?"

"I think you would've been in a completely different category of your own," Kokichi admits. "Well, at least you're only a tennis player. I have no idea what I would've done if you said you were an assassin or something!"

There's definitely something completely wrong here! I know it's selfish that I'm only thinking about myself here but I'm furious that Kokichi would accuse me of being dangerous! He's taking this entire situation far too seriously too! B-Because this has to be just a prank, right? There's no way in hell that we're going to have to actually kill each other! And if we have to then I won't let that happen! I'll stop whoever's behind all of this with my own two hands!

"Well someone looks like they're deep in thought!"

Kaede jumps when a completely new voice rings in her ear. She jumps backwards and almost knocks into Gonta in the process.

Standing on the bench is a...black and white teddy bear?

I can't help but think it looks sort of familiar but at the same time I have no clue what the hell this thing is! A-And did that teddy bear talk?! Things are just getting crazier and crazier by the second...

“What the hell are you?!” Kaito shouts as he knocks his fists together. “Are you the one responsible for us being here?! You are, aren’t you!”

“Calm down my dear students,” says the bear. “It looks like I’ve missed something very exciting! In any other situation I would’ve loved to listen to you all debate but I’m afraid there’s been some sort of mix up! You should’ve all been at the gym ages ago! And have any of you seen my children anywhere? I haven’t seen them either!”

“You have children?” Kirumi tilts her head to the side. “More importantly, who are you?”

“I’m your beloved headteacher of course!” The bear puts both of his paws to his mouth before giggling. “Puhuhuhu...puhuhuhuhu! Getting to meet fresh meat always gets me excited! However, I have a strict script to follow and you seem to be missing three students so I simply cannot start my introduction until everyone is here!”

“Script?” Korekiyo muses out loud.

Kaede grits her teeth and scowls at the bear. She’s too tired to deal with any more drama at the moment. Kokichi’s claims have already given her a headache and she’s doesn’t want to deal with this dumb bear too. “There’s no other students here but us! Since you’re the headteacher you should know that! They’ve graduated!”

“Graduated?” The bear blinks. “But that can’t be right! I’d remember if a dear student of mine had graduated! And after all, if a student of mine were to graduate then none of you would be here, that’s for sure!”

“Then perhaps you should check one of these tablets,” Ryoma says as he offers up his own. “There’s three students with profiles saying that they’ve graduated. We have no reason to lie about this.”

The bear pauses momentarily before grabbing the tablet for himself, grumbling in annoyance as he goes through the sixteen profiles.

“Has there been a glitch or something?” The bear mutters. “Huuuh? Wait a second, why are the rules already on here?! I had a whole dramatic announcement ready for those too!”

“So those rules are real?!” Tsumugi asks in horror. Her body starts to tremble. “Oh no...”

The bear goes stiff as he puts the tablet down on the table. For a second, he freezes, as if he’s in deep thought. The group watches the bear with a mixture of curiosity and anxiety.

“Hey, Ouma, do you recognise him too?” Kaito asks, half joking, half curious.

Kokichi shakes his head. “But he looks kinda cool, riiight?”

“Angie thinks he looks really weird,” Angie admits. “And Angie wants to know why one of his

eyes is red. Angie doesn't think that this is a normal teddy bear!"

"Of course he isn't you fucking bobble head," Miu snaps. "B-But I also want to...explore inside of him and see what he's made up of too. I'll have to get in deep but-"

"Okay, so there seems to have been some sort of error!" The bear suddenly springs back to life and Miu almost topples over in surprise, only managing to stay up right due to Tenko grabbing onto her arm. "But do not be alarmed, my dear students. Everything will be fixed momentarily!"

"And what does that mean?" Korekiyo asks.

"There's nothing for any of you to worry about!"

Kaede frowns before looking down at her own tablet. Is there a profile on this bear? Maybe she missed it earlier...

Hey, wait a second. The three missing students are...gone? Their profiles aren't here anymore! Did that bear just delete them now or something? But he was standing in front of us the entire time? How did this happen? Does this mean that he's not the only one responsible for us being here? I have so many questions but no way of getting the answers for them.

"Did you just get rid of the three missing students' profiles?" Kirumi asks as she narrows her eyes at her own screen. "But why? Are they not a part of our class?"

"Of course not, they've graduated!" The bear says. "Apparently! Because I sure as hell don't remember approving of their graduations! And from the looks of things they didn't follow the rules either if you're all still here and...eh? What's all that on the whiteboard?!"

The bear waddles over to the whiteboard and the white side of him starts to turn a dusty pink.

"Not only am I down three students, someone has also decided to spoil the entire-" The bear takes a deep breath before he starts to grumble. "Oh someone is seriously going to get it. Someone is going to be beary sorry for this."

"Spoil what?" Kokichi asks as he plays with his scarf. "Hey, maybe we should just totally drop whatever this game is since you clearly don't have anything organised. I mean, we won't tell anyone about this if you just let us leave now."

"I-I swear I won't fucking snitch either," Miu promises.

"No, no, no, there's no way I'm cancelling the killing game!"

Kaede can feel her heart start to thud loudly against her chest. Killing game? Did he just say Killing Game? So that's what the rules are for. But why the hell is this bear hosting a Killing Game? I certainly don't remember signing up to be a part of one! And there's no way I'll join in either! Although maybe I won't even have to take part at all. It seems that there's something wrong and things aren't going to plan. The bear looked really annoyed when he saw the whiteboard too.

"This isn't how I wanted to introduce myself but if needs must," the bear says before he clears his throat. "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Monokuma and I'll be your headmaster during your time here at the Ultimate Academy for Gifted Juveniles!"

"...you're the headmaster of this school?" Kirumi asks. "A bear?"

Monokuma's entire body sags. "I'm not just any bear, I'm Monokuma!"

“Gonta never heard of a Monokuma bear before,” Gonta admits bashfully. “Is Monokuma bear an endangered species?”

“My patience is an endangered species,” Monokuma grumbles. “This is just awful! I had a dramatic entrance and everything prepared and you all ruined it! You’re going to ruin my wonderful complexion! Stress is no good for bears, you know?!”

“I’m pretty sure stress is no good for anyone, bear or not,” Rantaro says. “And let’s slow down for just a moment. Did I hear you right when you said that you weren’t going to cancel a killing game?”

“Not just any killing game!” Monokuma’s eyes light back up. “Everyone’s killing game! As soon as you all woke up here you all joined the game! Isn’t this exciting?”

“Of course it’s not exciting!” Kaede retorts. “T-This is just some big joke, right?! There’s no way any of us would participate in your messed up killing game!”

“What, are you all friends or something?” Monokuma asks.

“Well, no, but-”

“From the sounds of things you’ve all already seen the rules, correct?” Monokuma asks. “Well then that means you should all get the gist of what’s going on. You’re all going to kill each other until there’s two people left in which then those two survivors will graduate from the academy!”

“Graduate…” Angie bobs her head to the side. “But, buuut, Angie thought the only way to graduate is to kill someone and win a class trial, yes?”

“That is another way to graduate if you want to get your hands dirty,” Monokuma agrees with a sinister smile. “In fact, that’s certainly the more fun way to graduate and I’d highly recommend trying it out! I welcome any form of murder in a killing game so be as creative as you like!”

“This is so messed up…” Tenko bites down on her bottom lip. “Tenko would never-”

“I’d never kill, I’d never hurt someone!” Monokuma scoffs. “Puh-lease! How many times have I heard someone say that before they snap and kill someone? You’ve all got murderous potential whether you like it or not! This killing game is a test to see how far that potential will take you all! After all, killing someone is only the first half of the process to getting to graduate.”

“Because you have to win a class trial too, correct?” Korekiyo says. “But what exactly is a class trial?”

“Don’t talk as if you’re actually interested in the game, man!” Kaito squawks.

“But of course I’m interested,” Korekiyo responds. “It’s not every day we’re in a situation like this. However, I must also reassure you that I really don’t have any intentions of killing you, Momota.”

“Oh, so you’ll happily kill the rest of us?” Miu snaps. “Fuck that for a laugh.”

“The class trials are also fun too since I’ll be observing them!” Monokuma starts to laugh. “And one small slip up from all of you also means I get to punish a lot of students if you’re all not diligent enough when investigating a classmate’s murder! You see, I’ve made the class trials fair for everyone! If the blackened is revealed then only they will be punished. However, if you vote for the wrong person then everyone besides the blackened will be punished!”

“A-And what do you mean by punishment?” Tsumugi asks.

“Let’s just say I’ve got some very fun punishments prepared. However, let’s think of it this way, what’s more fair than taking a life for a life?” Monokuma’s shoulders bounce up and down as he continues to laugh.

So if someone kills someone but gets found out...they get killed too? That’s...

“Oh, I see, I see, that is very fair,” Kokichi says as he rubs his chin. “Buuut isn’t it also a little unfair killing everyone if they vote wrong?”

“I like to be fair when handing out punishments,” Monokuma says. “So the blackened and the non blackened will receive equal punishment depending on the outcome of the trial.”

“So if someone kills someone else...” Ryoma grumbles. “Not only are they killing one person but everyone else too?”

“Brutal, I know,” Monokuma chuckles. “But those are the rules whether you like them or not!”

“You’re delusional if you think for one second that we’re going to follow them!” Kaede suddenly finds herself screaming as she jabs her finger at the bear. Her hands tremble when Monokuma gives her an amused look. “Why the hell would we even start killing each other in the first place?! I won’t let anyone here start the killing game!”

“Akamatsu, maybe you shouldn’t be so vocal?” Tsumugi whimpers as she shuffles closer to the pianist. “You’re going to make yourself a target.”

“Oh, no, I encourage this behaviour!” Monokuma looks Kaede dead in the eyes. “After all, it’s despairingly delicious to see the defiant ones snap in the end. They always do.”

Kaede feels a white hot anger start to boil inside of her. She wants to wipe that smirk off that damn bear’s face. Who does he think he is forcing them to play a game like this? Kaede wills her body to stop trembling because if she doesn’t calm down then she’s going to do something she’s going to regret.

I really do need to just stop and take a deep breath or I’ll be playing right into his hands! Or, well, paws. But that doesn’t matter! It doesn’t matter what he throws our way because I refuse to let anyone kill each other! I’m going to make sure we all find a way out of here before I let anyone die and there’s nothing Monokuma can do to stop me! Besides, I’d like to see him even try to kill us! He’s the one who has managed to lose three students anyway.

“You’re a piece of shit,” Kaito grumbles. “Akamatsu’s right, none of us are stupid enough to even start the killing game!”

“I know that,” Monokuma says before glancing over to the whiteboard. “So that’s why I like to give my students motives to kill! After all, it would be beary naive of me to think that you would all start to kill each other right off that bat! I do want you all to have fun here, of course, so I also expect you all to start making friends in your free time! That way when there’s a class trial they’ll be even more fun to watch! There’s nothing more fun than watching the face of someone realising that their precious friend has betrayed them!”

“You want to give us all a motive? This early on?” Tsumugi opens and closes her mouth. “But we’ve just woken up! Things are moving way too quickly!”

“Then don’t think of this as a motive but as a...welcoming present from your dear headteacher,”

Monokuma suggests as he waddles over to the whiteboard. “Now then, if I move a couple of photographs around...”

Monokuma moves Tsumugi’s photograph over to the potential victims group before moving both Kiibo’s and Kaito’s over to the failed graduates section. The bear takes a step back to admire his work.

“I don’t like spoilers myself but it seems this game is going to run a little differently anyway,” Monokuma says before spreading out his arms. “My gift to you all is this slither of knowledge. These groups on the whiteboard are completely accurate! However, I’m not revealing whether or not the failed graduates have *actually* tried to kill before. Only, well, maybe be extra cautious around them from now on.”

Monokuma disappears in a blink of an eye, leaving the group of thirteen students in a state of shock.

Kaede’s vision starts to swim.

This has got to be some huge joke, right? I can’t believe...no I refuse to believe that any of this is real! Things like this only happen in messed up works of fiction. Someone like me could never be a part of a reality like this! Because...because this can’t be real. I don’t want it to be real! There’s absolutely no way I’m even going to listen to Monokuma for one second! But I must admit, even though I don’t want to believe a thing he’s said...

Kaede glances at the photograph of herself on the whiteboard. The girl in the photograph is oblivious and smiling. The girl back then had no clue her photograph was going to be pinned on a whiteboard as evidence to suggest that she’s capable of...murder.

Why am I scared of myself?

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 1 Part 3

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry if there's any mistakes! I did read through this chapter several times and did fix a couple of errors but my internet played up half way through so I'm not sure if every single small mistake was fixed. Hopefully everything should be okay though!

Thank you for reading! Have a nice day!

There's an undeniable tension in the air once Monokuma leaves.

Kaede has only been awake for an hour at best and she already feels like she has lost against Monokuma. She swallows a partially thick lump in her throat. Her lips feel dry. Her hands are shaking. Her eyes are stinging. Her confidence has been grind down to nothing but dust.

"W-Why are you all looking so sad?!"

Tsumugi's face turns stern as she gathers the attention of everyone. Kaede herself is definitely surprised by her sudden outburst. Tsumugi has presented herself as a quiet and plain girl from the moment she woke up. Shouting at the group like this is the last thing Kaede expected from her.

"Are we all just going to give up now?" Tsumugi asks before putting a hand to her chest. "For all we know Monokuma is just trying to trick us! I trust all of you more than I'd ever trust him so it's plain to see that we should just ignore him and the whiteboard! I-I won't let the group fall apart so soon! We have to stick together!"

"But to have someone imply that I'm a killer," Kiibo murmurs, his face turning red. "It's highly distressing as well as completely inappropriate! My professor designed me in a way that I could be just like everyone else! I want to befriend people, not kill them!"

"For Monokuma to say that we all have murderous potential," Korekiyo says as his eyes close. "It's rather interesting, although I can't deny that there's a certain...thrill of being reminded of this. After all, humans are such strange creatures. We certainly are capable of anything when pushed to a certain limit."

"Um, Angie thinks you're totes weird but she also thinks Tsumugi is right!" Angie's eyes light up before she smiles. "My God also says that we simply cannot give up at the first hurdle! In order for us to live peacefully and find a safe place to call paradise then we cannot give up now!"

Kirumi pulls a pained face as she clasps her hands down by her waist. "To suggest that a maid would kill someone she cares for...it's simply unforgivable. I've devoted my life to looking after people and to have a...bear say otherwise is certainly more frustrating than I could imagine."

"To hell with what Monokuma said!" Kaito pumps a fist. "Shirogane's right, we can't just fall apart now! I don't trust a single thing he said and I certainly don't believe that whiteboard! The only thing I believe in at the moment is that we're all going to get out of here alive! Instead of wallowing we need to start finding an exit!"

Tenko nods. "For a degenerate male you're actually pretty smart! Tenko agrees, that dumb bear

doesn't know what he's talking about! Tenko knows that there's good and bad people in the world but she believes wholeheartedly that we're all in this together! So that means we're all leaving together!"

"Gonta want to prove Monokuma wrong too!" Gonta cries as he grits his teeth. "Gonta knows he is big and scary but Gonta would never hurt anyone ever! Gonta not even hurt a single bug ever too and they're small and delicate!"

"B-But what if the list really is true?" Miu whimpers. "What if that board is actually right?! Then I-I'll be in danger because someone here is going to notice my gorgeous looks and strangle the fuck out of me the first chance they get! And not in a good way!"

"I wouldn't worry about that," Ryoma sighs. "After all, that whiteboard has to be wrong. I'm the last person that should be called a victim, after all."

"That's right, the whiteboard has to be wrong!" Tsumugi agrees encouragingly. Her eyes light up as she realises that everyone hasn't given up just yet. After all, she can't just let everyone give up now! "Even if everything seems plain scary at the moment there's still a chance we might all get out of this alive! Don't you agree, Akamatsu?"

"Huh?" Kaede blinks in surprise.

I've been wallowing so much that I didn't even realise everyone was talking. But why do they all look so happy? Aren't they afraid? I'm terrified! There's a chance that I could've tried to hurt someone here before and even if Monokuma is just trying to trick us...I'm not sure if I can forgive myself.

"C'mon, Akamatsu!" Tsumugi grabs her hand and squeezes. "Please stop looking so sad! The whiteboard has to just be a lie, after all! And even if some parts of it may be true then...I forgive you!"

"You forgive me?" Kaede's heart thuds against her chest.

It's clear that neither of us really understand why Tsumugi is forgiving me. No one knows what I did, if I even did something in the first place anyway. However, for Tsumugi to say something like this to me even after what Monokuma said...I feel like I'm going to cry. C'mon, Kaede! Pull yourself together! It's way too soon to be breaking down like this. If Tsumugi can be strong then so can you!

"I'm plainly confused as to why you're being labelled as a threat but I'm sure Monokuma is just trying to rile us up early on," Tsumugi says. "However, even if there is that small chance that you have done something bad before then I forgive you so you need to forgive yourself too!"

"I'd be a hypocrite if I said I didn't trust you," Ryoma tells her. "Of course I'm wary of the entire situation we're in but it's important to not crumble from the get go. I'm not sure what Monokuma knows about everyone, including you, Akamatsu, but you all will have a ways to go if you start judging each other now without understanding why people have been labelled how they have."

"Besides, we also don't know if Monokuma is lying!" Tenko declares as she gives the whiteboard a slight kick. "Tenko proposes we just ignore it!"

That is a nice thought...but I'm not so sure we should just ignore what's on it so quickly. In order to keep everyone safe I need to make sure to take a note of all threats here, even if that does include myself. Also there's someone who really doesn't look happy at the moment...

Kaede watches as Kokichi bites the nail on his thumb as he stares at the whiteboard. He's wearing an expression that she can't decipher. She really doesn't know what to think about him at the moment. After all, Kokichi was the one who started putting the pictures up on the whiteboard. Monokuma was the one who confirmed the groups he put people in. Whilst Kaede can easily try to ignore Monokuma she's not sure she can do the same for Kokichi.

He's one of us, after all. I just wanna know how he knew what we're all capable of. Is he actually working with Monokuma or not? He did seem surprised when Monokuma agreed with his claims. I think I should definitely try to keep an eye on him from now on, even if it is to make sure that he's not up to no good.

She turns to Rantaro. He's been quiet too. Could it be that he believes the whiteboard too? She can't help but feel disappointed if that's the case. She doesn't want him to think that she's done horrible things before, even if she doesn't remember them.

"You guys might be right," Kaede says gently. "We need to work together to find a way out and the only way we'll be able to work together is if we trust each other. I know that you all might not have any reason to trust each other right now, especially me, but I want to try my best to prove to you all that Monokuma must be wrong. And in order to do that then I need to forgive myself and everyone else."

"You can start by finding us a way out of here," Miu decides before huffing. "But don't expect us all to start holding hands and sing songs together after a speech like that! You might be fine being around murderers but I'm not!"

"Iruma! That's highly unfair!" Kiibo jabs a metallic finger towards the whiteboard. "What's more is that no one here is a killer either! Monokuma said we're only failed graduates, not actual ones. So even if...some of us may have tried to kill before..."

"No one actually has but me," Ryoma says before sighing. "You should all keep that in mind if any of you really do believe the whiteboard."

"Nyahahaha! How divine!" Angie bobs her head from side to side. "Angie's God also says we shouldn't start holding grudges now because we've all been blessed with the fact that we don't remember our past sins. We've all been cleansed so Angie thinks you should all be grateful!"

"I'm not sure if I completely understand what you're about," Kirumi admits. "However, I think I understand enough. However, I do want to profusely apologize for my past actions, whatever they may be. I'm not sure if I can completely forgive myself but I will do whatever I can to aid you all in finding a way out of here."

"Forgiveness is such a strange concept," Korekiyo says. "Such as, there's many forms of it. I could go into greater detail but I fear that would be a waste of time. After all, getting out of here should be our number one priority, yes?"

"We should split off into groups," Tsumugi says. "That way we can cover more ground quicker! I know splitting up is usually bad but there's so much ground to cover that I think that doing this is for the best."

"If that's the case then maybe you should pick groups?" Kaito suggests. "You're on a roll today, Shirogane!"

"Oh! Um, thank you!" Tsumugi's cheeks turn pink. "However, I'm not usually like this. I'm not used to being in control, you see. Someone as plain as me usually ends up as a side character, not a

main one.”

“Shirogane shouldn’t talk about herself like that!” Tenko cries. “You’re fine just the way you are!”

Tsumugi giggles behind her hand. “That’s very nice of you to say, Chabashira. Okay then, I guess I’ll be the one picking the groups! Since there’s thirteen of us, maybe we should split into groups of three, although there’ll also be one group of four. Hmm. I know! I’ll be in a group with Akamatsu, Amami and...Ouma!”

“You want to be in a group with me?” Kaede opens and closes her mouth. “Even after everything?”

“Of course! I trust you!” Tsumugi smiles sweetly. “Momota, I want you to be in a group with Angie and Gonta!”

“Sweet! We’re going to be the best group of them all!” Kaito declares proudly as he slams his fists together.

“Kiibo, will you pair up with Iruma and...Tojo?”

“Haaah? You’re putting me with two potential threats?” Miu sneers. “Fuck that! They’re both going to stab me in the back the first moment they get!”

“No I won’t!” Kiibo looks horrified. “Iruma, please just calm down! We won’t be able to find an exit if you don’t try to at least attempt to trust everyone!”

“But she’s trying to get me killed!” Miu barks back. “Fuck this, I’ll find an exit on my own! Four eyes clearly doesn’t know what she’s doing! She lacks a brain as well as a chest!”

“I-I can always change the groups if you want?” Tsumugi says with a small tremble in her voice. “But I thought that you and Kiibo might get along. Don’t you think he’s interesting, Iruma? I thought that a robot and an inventor would get on well together.”

“I...I am a person too, you know?” Kiibo sighs.

“I can assure you that I will make sure no harm comes to you either,” Kirumi adds. “However, with how circumstances are I understand why you’re weary of me. If it helps you feel more comfortable would you perhaps like to be the one who leads our group, Iruma? You can order Kiibo and I around as much as you like.”

“Oh?” Miu pauses before twirling a strand of her hair around her finger. “I-I suppose that’s a fair compromise. But if I see one of you so much as look at me funny then I’ll make sure all of my adoring fans will come after ya!”

“Then that leaves me with Hoshi and Chabashira,” Korekiyo observes. “I’m not sure if this is the ideal group.”

A growling Tenko nods her head. “Shirogane, why have you left me with these two degenerates!? Tenko understands that some choices are hard but Tenko really does not like this group!”

“Honestly...” Ryoma tugs on his hat. “Wouldn’t you prefer to be put in a group full of guys anyway, Chabashira? That means you can keep an eye on them.”

“Hmm...” Tenko shoots Ryoma with a suspicious look. “Tenko understands your logic. Although she isn’t very happy with her group she shall take the burden of keeping an eye on both of these males!”

“Then that’s those two groups sorted!” Kaito cheers. “So, where should we all start looking first?”

“I think one group should look outside,” Tsumugi says. “My group is the biggest so I’ll take the outside area. Tojo, could you check the basement and first floor of the school?”

“Of course,” Kirumi answers with a bow. “If that is your request then I’ll do my utmost best to fulfill it.”

“Momota, will your group cover the upstairs of the academy? I know there’s a lot of rooms but...” Tsumugi smiles. “You seem to have the most energetic people in your group.”

“Easy!” Kaito grins. “Team Kaito will do our best!”

“Then where will Tenko go?” Tenko asks.

“I want your group to check what’s behind that wall,” Tsumugi says as she points to the walled off area outside. “I saw that there’s a building inside but I’m not sure what it is. Now that everyone has a place to go, how about we all meet back up here in an hour and report what we find?”

“That sounds like a good plan,” Kirumi agrees as she leads her group into the school. Kaito’s group follows after her happily.

Tenko turns to Tsumugi. “If anything happens to you then shout as loud as you can! Tenko will come and help you as soon as she can!”

“Oh, I’m not sure if there’s any need for that,” Tsumugi says with a smile. “I’m happy with everyone in my group! But if I do need your help then I’ll make sure to shout!”

Tenko gives the blue haired girl a firm nod before marching away towards the walls outside, Korekiyo and Ryoma following behind her a little less enthusiastically.

I’m feeling a little nervous right now. What song might calm me down? Perhaps One Summer’s Day by Joe Hisaishi? For whatever reason I can’t help but feel...nostalgic about something. Even though this school is somewhere I don’t want to be, it almost feels like that maybe I’ve been here before. Geez! I really need to stop over thinking all the time! I have an exit to find!

“Right, now that’s all been sorted!” Tsumugi claps her hands together. “All of us should find an exit ourselves! I was thinking that we should check the glass walls one last time and then maybe check some of the outside buildings? We should maybe take a peek in the dormitories and I also think that there’s a building behind the school we should check out too. Is that okay with everyone?”

“That sounds good!” Kaede pumps her fists before looking at Rantaro and Kokichi awkwardly. Neither of them have said anything for a while now. Kaede swallows. “Um, are you both okay? You’ve both been oddly quiet.”

“Of course I’m okay,” Kokichi says as a smile stretches onto his face. “But I’m simply so terrified since there’s a killer in our group that I’m frozen in fear and can’t move! You should all totally go on without me!”

“Now hold on a second, Ouma,” Rantaro says with a frown. “You never did say how you knew what groups to put us into. Even Monokuma agreed with your claims. You do realise how suspicious you are at the moment?”

“Yeah but...” Kokichi pouts. “You’re not angry at me, are you? I made the game fair! You’re all

stupid for thinking that you can all be friends so soon!”

“I’m not expecting us all to be friends right off the bat,” Kaede says softly. “But I do want us all to work together to find a potential exit. I’m not sure what you remember at the moment, Ouma, but I can reassure you that...that the person I am now does want to help everyone. Even if I have done bad things in the past that I can’t remember, that person is not me. Maybe she never even existed either.”

“However, there’s always that what if,” Kokichi responds. “And because of that what if isn’t it only fair that I get to be super wary of you? Not everyone is going to forgive right away and it’s a little up yourself to think that people should too, riiiiight?”

“I don’t want people to forgive me straight away!” Kaede grits her teeth. “But what will it take for you to at least trust me enough to believe that I’ll get us out of here?”

“Of course I’ll never trust you to find an exit,” Kokichi says. “Because the chances of there actually being one is super slim. Buuut it’s better for people to realise that themselves so if you want to waste the next hour looking around then be my guest.”

He doesn’t think that there’s an exit? But of course there has to be one! How else did we end up in this school anyway? It’s not like we were teleported here or something. I’ll prove him wrong myself! And why is Rantaro being so quiet? He didn’t even try to step in when Kokichi started to argue with me. Is he okay? Perhaps he’s feeling sick?

“At least we’re trying,” Tsumugi says with a frown. “But we should at least search for an exit before ruling out that there’s not one first, right? After all, that’s what people would normally do first when waking up in a situation like this!”

“Yeah, but-”

“C’mon guys, that’s enough,” Rantaro finally interjects, rubbing the front of his head with a sigh. “There’s no harm in finding an exit so how about we start looking instead of arguing with each other. After all, it looks like we have a lot of ground to cover in only an hour.”

“Well Shirogane was the one who suggested that we all meet back up in an hour,” Kokichi pouts. “You can blame her for that!”

“I-I was only trying to be organised!” Tsumugi cries before crossing her arms. “Besides, I shouldn’t have to put up with someone as plainly suspicious as you! I wouldn’t be surprised if you’re working alongside Monokuma! You both seem to be on the same wavelength!”

Kokichi pulls a face. “Oh really?”

“Guys, please!” Kaede shouts before pinching the bridge of her nose. “Can we just start searching? We don’t have to like each other for now but can we all try to at least get along for the next hour?”

“Why didn’t you ask sooner?” Kokichi asks exasperatedly. “That’s easy for someone like me!”

“I highly doubt that!” Tsumugi argues before swallowing nervously. “But, ah, I’m sorry Akamatsu! I didn’t realise I was wasting so much time...”

Kaede ends up walking straight towards the closest bit of glass wall. The grass brushes against her legs, tickling her exposed skin as she marches the group away from the centre of the school and to the outer area. There’s a couple of trees that provide a large amount of shade. In any other situation Kaede would take note of this and use this as a spot to come back to have a picnic at.

She vaguely wonders how many bugs are in the grass before wincing. She hopes she doesn't accidentally step on any. Usually it wouldn't bother her if she did but she doesn't want to upset Gonta either.

Thankfully, Tsumugi and Kokichi have finally stopped arguing. However, Kaede does spot them both giving each other funny looks from time to time. She sighs on the inside. What is she going to do with the both of them? She thought that Tsumugi would get along with everyone but it seems even she has her limits. Then again, Kaede is also grateful how much Tsumugi is sticking up for her even though she has no reason to. It makes Kaede feel warm.

However, on the flip side, as much as she loathes Kokichi's current behaviour, she sort of gets where he's coming from. If she found out that someone was a threat here then...she would've outed them too, even if it did put her in danger. She knows she would if she had to.

I wonder if I would've outed myself if I knew what Kokichi does? I think that maybe in the end I would've. So in a way I guess...I guess I do respect Kokichi for trying to keep the group safe in his own way, even if it was blunt and straight to the point. However, I do want him to spill about finding all this information out before us. I know he said that being a leader means he's always on top of things but is that actually right? This guy seems to be able to lie so easily too so I'm struggling to figure out what he's lying about and what he's telling the truth about.

When Kaede finally reaches the glass the first thing she sees is her reflection. She frowns and presses her face up against the glass. She was hoping that she'd be able to see something outside but all she can see is the sky. She finds that pretty strange in a way. Has the school been built in a completely isolated area? Then again that would make sense. No one would've been able to get away with building a school and glass wall like this in a public area without being questioned.

The glass is cool against her skin and for a second she closes her eyes, feeling her headache ease off slightly. For a second she allows herself to forget the entire situation she's in and breathes.

C'mon, Kaede, you're doing so well so far. I guess I'm pretty proud of myself for not freaking out so much at the moment. I know if I start crying now then people will see me as weak and I don't want that. There's no way people would accept me as their leader if I asked them now but I still want to look out for everyone in my own way. Even though there's only a small chance of finding an exit, I want to give the group hope.

"Are you feeling okay, Akamatsu? You've been leaning against the glass for quite a while now."

"Oh, Amami!" Kaede opens her eyes and sighs. "Sorry, I guess I zoned out for a minute there, huh?"

"You should appreciate each moment of peace you get," Rantaro tells her before the corner of his lips point up. "I don't think we're going to get much of it whilst we're here, especially with the personalities of some people here."

Kaede laughs. "You've got a point."

She spots that Tsumugi and Kokichi are a little further away from her and Rantaro, exploring a different area of the glass wall. Tsumugi seems to keep tapping the glass expectantly, as if she hits it in the right area then a door will appear. Kokichi watches her with a smirk.

"Hey, Amami?" Kaede asks as she turns to face him. "I'm sorry if I'm prying but why didn't you say anything before? You sort of just went really quiet."

And I want to know if you think I'm a bad person.

"Ah, about that..." Rantaro rubs the back of his head. "I guess I didn't even try to stick up for you back there, huh? My bad, I can see why you'd be so annoyed about that."

"No, that's not that I meant!" Kaede shakes her head. "It's just, do you actually believe what's on the whiteboard or not?"

"Honestly Akamatsu, I..." Rantaro looks off to the side. His reflection frowns at him. "I think there's some sort of truth in Monokuma's words. Although, believe me when I say I'm not scared of anyone. Not even you, if that's what you're worried about. However, there is something that's bugging me."

"Oh? What is it?"

"Why did Ouma stop grouping the pictures when he did?" Rantaro asks. "Remember that small group of three suspicious people? Now, I wonder why they were all put there before being moved..."

"It is a little strange," Kaede agrees before huffing. "But I'm not sure how he was able to make up those groups in the first place. Do you think he's working with Monokuma?"

"It's a possibility but..." Rantaro frowns. "If he was working with Monokuma then it would be stupid to expose information like that. Say if you did have an advantage to be able to kill someone easier or have tried before...I don't think Monokuma would willingly reveal information like that so quickly. He said that we're in a killing game, yeah? Well, the word game would imply that Monokuma wants to have fun watching us."

"Revealing who is more capable of killing would make them less likely to kill as they know people are gonna be more wary of them too..." Kaede realises. "And everyone will look out more for the potential victims as well."

"I think the information on the whiteboard would make it harder for people to want to kill, not encourage them," Rantaro says before squeezing Kaede's shoulder. "I'm sorry that I'm not saying what you want to hear but..."

"No, I get where you're coming from," Kaede tells him and covers her disappointment with a smile. "I-I guess we should all be grateful that me and the others in my group are only failed graduates, huh? So even though we might've tried, we never actually did kill anyone..."

"It is a little confusing that we don't remember being potential victims or killers though," Rantaro responds. "I'm starting to think Monokuma has a way of making us forget things."

"Of course he does," Kaede grumbles. "But if that is the case then..."

"What is it?"

Kaede let's out a frustrated yell. "I'm just so confused! I'm thinking that maybe we met the three missing students before but if that's the case then why did they leave us behind?"

"Maybe they had no choice," Rantaro suggests. "But maybe we should be grateful that even if we had met them before then at least they managed to escape."

Kaede flushes. *Oh crap, that was really selfish of me to say! Of course I'm happy that those students managed to escape. Just because I'm bitter about things right now shouldn't mean I*

should be tearing others down. Why can't I be more like Rantaro? He's super calm and collected right now! Even when we first woke up he wasn't freaking out as much as I was! He must think I'm a baby or something.

"Hey, don't look so down," Rantaro tells her, giving her shoulder one more squeeze before his arm dangles down by his side. "If they found a way out then that means there's gotta be an exit somewhere, right?"

"Oh yeah, that's right," Kaede murmurs.

Rantaro pulls a face. "Hey, Akamatsu? Are you okay? Do you want to maybe take a break?"

"I've hardly done enough to deserve a break!" Kaede snaps before her eyes widen. She bites the inside of her mouth before saying, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have yelled at you. I'm just..."

"Hey, it's okay," Rantaro says. She notices how his eyes soften. "C'mon, how about we start walking? The sooner we check the glass walls then the sooner we can explore some other areas? I don't know about you but I quite like exploring."

Kaede bites her lip as Rantaro leads her ahead to meet back up with Tsumugi and Kokichi. Both of them have gone quiet. Did they hear what she and Rantaro were talking about?

"Didn't Momo-chan already tell us that he checked the walls with some others, checking them again would be suuuper boring," Kokichi complains, passing by some grass that reaches up to his waist. "If there is going to be some super hidden exit out here then it certainly wouldn't be so close to the walls. That would be too obvious!"

"Then where would you say an exit would be then?" Tsumugi asks, sounding far too exasperated.

"Huh? But didn't I already say that there's probably not an exit?" Kokichi responds as he puts his hands behind his head. "The only exit for this game is to participate and win it. What, are you all expecting to find some huge sign or something that says where the exit is? That's sooo cliché and boring and sooo obviously a trap."

"There's no harm in searching," Rantaro tells him. "So how about less complaining and more searching, hmm?"

"That doesn't sound very fun," Kokichi groans. "But okaaaay, whatever Amami wants."

It takes them around twenty minutes to actually walk around the entire glass wall. Kaede soon realises that checking the glass really was a waste of time by the time they reach the point they started at. All she saw the entire trip around was glass, grass and trees. There was the occasional patch of flowers but nothing that looked like an obvious exit.

Kokichi looks especially smug by the time Kaede realises her defeat. Her skin goes slightly clammy as she grabs onto her arm.

"L-Let's not lose hope just yet!" Tsumugi says as she points to the old looking building near the back of the school. "Let's check inside there! Maybe there's a hidden door or something?"

"Or just another dead end," Kokichi suggests as he follows behind the blue haired girl, whistling rather happily to himself.

Tsumugi pushes open the door and reveals an old looking room. There's a large engine in the corner that's covered in rust as well as lots of railings and grass. However, what intrigues Kaede

the most is the manhole on the ground. Her eyes widened. If there's a manhole here then that means they can go underground. If they're lucky enough then maybe there'll be some tunnels that lead out of the school.

"Come help me lift this up!" Kaede cries as she rushes over the manhole, landing on the ground heavily. She feels her knees let out a throb of discomfort, which she ignores.

Tsumugi is instantly by her side and her delicate fingers start to grab at the edges of the manhole cover, pulling alongside Kaede. The circular piece of metal barely budes so Rantaro also joins in. They finally make progress and the cover is prized from the ground. Kaede wipes her forehead whilst Rantaro rolls the cover to lean it against the wall.

"We'll have to warn the others that this is here," Kaede says. "We don't want anyone falling down this hall by accident."

"I mean, if people use their eyes then they won't accidentally fall," Kokichi responds as he rolls his eyes. "Buuut I am feeling super generous so how about we skip going down there and tell everyone now!"

"But we've still got lots of time!" Kaede argues as she starts to climb down into the hole. "Come on, it's not that deep! We'll be down in no time!"

"Yeah, come on!" Tsumugi encourages as she starts to climb down the metal ladder herself.

However, Kokichi stares at the hole with a blank expression.

"Do you not want to go down?" Rantaro asks curiously.

"I just don't want to get my clothes dirty," Kokichi says with a sniff, turning his head to the side.

Tsumugi blinks before her eyes go wide. "Oh, are you scared of tight spaces or something?"

Kokichi bristles. "A leader isn't scared of anything nor do they have any weaknesses!"

"But then why else won't you go down?" Tsumugi asks as she starts descending down further into the tunnel.

"Actually, I might give the tunnels a miss too," Rantaro calls down to them.

"Huh? But I thought you liked exploring?" Kaede asks from the bottom of the tunnel. It's cold and dark. "Are you sure you don't want to join us?"

"I'll be right up here with Ouma if you need any help," Rantaro reassures her. "I'm sure with the amount of noise Shirogane made earlier then I'll have no issue hearing if you both need any assistance."

"You're not going to let that drop, are you?" Tsumugi grumbles before sighing. "I guess it's just you and me then, Akamatsu."

"Yeah, I guess so," Kaede says. She's not that upset that it's only her and Tsumugi down here but...

"It's sort of scary down here, don't you think?" Tsumugi laughs nervously. "And...that sign over there is plain suspicious."

Kaede follows Tsumugi's pointing finger over to a wooden sign that points towards a large tunnel

entrance. The sign says that the exit should be in the tunnels but Kaede can't help but suddenly feel disappointed. It's all too obvious that Monokuma has been down here and put that sign there.

"Still, we should probably go inside just to make sure that there's no exit," Kaede says shakily.

She jumps when Tsumugi suddenly shoves her hands into her own, lacing their fingers together. Tsumugi lets out a bashful laugh as she rubs her cheek with a finger. "Ah, sorry, Akamatsu. I'm just kind of really jumpy at the moment and I'd really appreciate it if we held hands."

"That's fine!" Kaede squeezes the cosplayer's hand gently as they walk into the tunnel together.

It's more spacious inside than what Kaede thought it would be. The floors are made of metal and the walls are made from stone. It's cold and damp and dark. However, Kaede presses on. She spots a metal wall with a door hanging open. She tilts her head to the side.

Huh? This looks like it should be closed but it's not. Did Monokuma forget to close it perhaps? Has...has someone else been down here?

"Oh, how lucky!" Tsumugi says but she also sounds confused too.

The two step through the door together and follow the path further into the tunnel. Thankfully there's several torches lining up along the walls so at least they're not descending into a deeper darkness. However, it is starting to get cooler and cooler the longer the two stay down in the tunnel.

Tsumugi herself looks incredibly confused as they both easily navigate the tunnels.

"I thought Monokuma would've made it a lot harder than this to get to the exit," Tsumugi comments as they both start to climb up some stone steps. She puts a hand above her eyes and peers further into the tunnel. "In fact, I don't see any obstacles in our way at all! Something doesn't seem right."

"Maybe Monokuma did have something set up down here but forgot to turn it on?" Kaede suggests. "I agree with you that something doesn't feel right but we can't stop now. I won't be satisfied until we at least make it to the end."

"Ah! Whatever you say, Akamatsu!"

Whilst the tunnel is spacious, it is also very long. Kaede has no clue how long the two of them have been walking now. Five or ten minutes? They also have to walk back too...

"Hey, wait a second!" Tsumugi's eyes light up. "I think I see the end of the tunnel!"

Kaede gasps as Tsumugi starts to run, pulling the pianist alongside her. Kaede can barely keep up with Tsumugi's long legs as the cosplayer all but sprints to the end, her shoes hitting against the metal floor loudly. The sound echoes throughout the tunnels.

The two start panting once Tsumugi finally stops running, both of them clutching their legs with their hands. However, Kaede finds the stitch that is starting to grow in her side to feel more pleasant than an actual nuisance. It makes her feel more grounded.

"Ahaha, sorry about that," Tsumugi giggles nervously. She recovers first. "I just got excited when I thought I saw the end of the tunnel! Although, this looks sort of weird, don't you think? This area seems kind of out of place compared to the rest of the school."

She's right. The area they're standing in seems like a set from a sci-fi film. There's yellow railings and neon blue lights and metal ramps. However, what catches Kaede's attention the most is the large door at the end of the tunnel. The pianist can't help but feel excited as she rushes up to it.

"Akamatsu, wait!"

"But this might be the exit!" Kaede calls back excitedly as she starts to tug on the door. There's no handle so she settles with trying to pry the door open herself with her hands. Her attempts soon become apparently useless as the door doesn't even budge an inch. Kaede huffs as she tries again.

"Akamatsu, please be careful!" Tsumugi cries as she eases the pianist from the door. "You're going to hurt yourself if you keep on doing this!"

"I'm fine!" Kaede insists, even though her fingers and her fingernails are starting to sting. She goes to grab the door again but Tsumugi stops her by gently putting her hands on the pianist's shoulders.

"You're not going to get the door open by doing that," Tsumugi tells her as she points to a complicated looking machine. "I think we can only open the door by using that control panel. However, it's saying we need a card to open it."

Kaede blinks as she finally stops. "Huh? What do you mean we need a card?"

"Akamatsu, I don't think this door is opening any time soon," Tsumugi tells her sadly. "I think...I think maybe Ouma's right and this was just a big waste of time. After all, it was pretty naive of us to think that Monokuma would let us leave so easily."

So despite actually finding a potential exit...we can't go through it? This is...this is bullshit!

Kaede glowers at the door as she gives it a kick which she instantly regrets. Pain shoots up her leg and she grabs her foot, feeling angry tears start to settle against her eyelashes. She bites the inside of her mouth so heavily that she thinks she can taste blood.

I'm such an idiot for thinking that I'd find an exit so easily. I'm such an embarrassment...

"Oh, Akamatsu..." Tsumugi murmurs before pulling Kaede into a hug that is filled with so much warmth that Kaede startles before melting against the blue haired girl, burying her face into her shoulder. Kaede cries as Tsumugi strokes her hair. "I'm sorry, I should've never suggested we search outside. If I had picked somewhere else then..."

"It's not your fault," Kaede says in between sobs. She feels guilty for getting Tsumugi's blazer shoulder all wet. "It's my fault for being so...for being so useless! I'm the one who couldn't rally the group when they needed it the most and now I can't even find an exit we can use! I'm also...I'm also dangerous too! Shirogane, what if we really have woken up here before and I tried to kill someone! I'm horrible!"

"No you're not, Akamatsu," Tsumugi says with a frown as she pushes Kaede away ever so slightly. The cosplayer grabs Kaede's shoulders and squeezes. "You're Kaede Akamatsu and you are fine just the way you are. I don't care what Monokuma has labelled you as because you're my friend and I trust you. When we both woke up here the first thing you did when you thought that we were in danger was protect me. Now it's my turn to protect you too, even if it's from Monokuma's tricks!"

Kaede feels her face crumple as fresh tears threaten to roll down her cheeks. However, before they even get the chance to, Tsumugi brushes them away carefully with her thumb. Why is Tsumugi being so nice to her? She doesn't deserve this. She doesn't deserve this at all...

“Let’s wait here for a couple of minutes, well, until your face stops looking so red,” Tsumugi suggests carefully as she gives Kaede’s shoulder one last squeeze. “We’ll tell everyone that it’s plain obvious that this is not an exit but instead a trap.”

“That sounds like a good plan,” Kaede agrees, sniffing. She wipes her eyes with the sleeve of her shirt. “And, um, thank you, Shirogane.”

Tsumugi smiles.

Kaede ends up having to use her bedroom.

Despite all the searching, no one was successful in finding an exit. Not Kaito or Miu or Tenko or anyone. All that was found were classrooms, a swimming pool, a casino and some sort of hotel that made Tenko turn red when she talked about it.

Tsumugi had told the group about the tunnel and the obvious fake exit. She didn’t mention how Kaede had wailed when she found it. She did, however, make a big deal about how Kokichi and Rantaro didn’t even bother to help them find it, which caused Tenko to threaten to flip them both until Ryoma and Kaito had to step in.

Kaede sits down on the edge of her bed and puts a pillow to her face before screaming.

How am I still here? How are we still all here? When I first woke up I had convinced myself so badly that this was all going to be one big joke that now I’m actually starting to feel really scared. I’m lucky that I found a key to lock my bedroom door on the table so at least I know that someone isn’t going to break in and...no, I can’t think like that! No one is going to start the killing game!

She flops down onto the bed, her pillow falling uselessly onto the floor. It pains her to think this but the bed is actually rather comfortable. The mattress is soft and spongy and feels like it belongs in a very fancy hotel. She can feel her eyelids already start to feel heavy the longer she stays like this.

Maybe I should freshen up and go to sleep? I don’t know how red my eyes are at the moment but I know some people did give me funny looks earlier. Miu even had the audacity to ask if I was high too...

However, when Kaede pulls herself up from her bed she hears a knock at her door. She freezes. Whoever knocked only knocked twice, slow and considerate. She quickly starts to rub at her eyes, desperately hoping that they’re back to normal now.

Although I wonder why someone wants to talk to me? In private no less too? Did they not want to wait until the morning to talk?

She heads over to the door and with a deep breath opens it wide.

“Amami and Chabashira?” Kaede blinks. “What are you both doing here?”

“Well I-”

“Tenko saw this degenerate male head towards your door whilst she was doing some exercises before bed and decided to follow him!” Tenko answers before crossing her arms. “Tenko knows that men always have ulterior motives, especially when visiting a girl so late into the night so Tenko has decided to keep an eye on you!”

“You’ve really got the wrong idea, Chabashira,” Ranaro sighs. “I actually came here to ask if Akamatsu was okay. I didn’t want to mention this in front of the others but you looked like you had been crying earlier.”

“Oh, that!” Kaede smiles, even though she instantly feels the corner of her lips twitch in protest. “I, ah fell over in the tunnels and hurt my...arm! It hurt really bad so...”

“Tenko doesn’t want Akamatsu to feel uncomfortable but even she can tell that’s a lie,” Tenko says with a frown. “Are you still upset about what that nasty bear said earlier? Because Tenko can beat him up for you if you really want!”

“Chabashira? Don’t you remember the rules?” Rantaro raises an eyebrow. “You’ll get punished if you do that.”

“Tenko will take any form of punishment if it means Akamatsu will be okay!” Tenko declares. “Tenko isn’t sure what’s going on at the moment but she trusts Akamatsu. Not just because she’s a female either but because Tenko can tell she has a kind heart! In fact, Tenko has just the plan to prove that Akamatsu is a good person!”

“Oh?” Kaede’s eyes go wide. “How so?”

“Come to dojo tomorrow and Tenko will do her special technique to prove how good of a person you are!” Tenko decides with a satisfied huff. “...and Tenko might as well also use this technique on you too, Amami! The more people Tenko can figure out, the better!”

“What is this technique?” Rantaro asks. “Are you going to spar us?”

“Hah! Like you could take Tenko on!” Tenko shakes her head. “But Tenko promises this technique won’t hurt anyone at all! She uses it to read her opponents and it works every time! Tenko promises!”

“You don’t seem like the type of person to lie in the first place anyway,” Kaede says. “But, um, thank you.”

“Ooo, Akamatsu’s sincere expression is enough to make me feel weak in the knees,” Tenko murmurs before shaking her head. “But Tenko just wants to make complete sure that Akamatsu is okay because even she noticed that Akamatsu looked really upset, like, more upset than anyone else!”

“Did Shirogane say something to you?” Rantaro suddenly asks.

Tenko growls. “You degenerate! How dare you suggest that Shirogane made Akamatsu cry!”

“That’s not what I meant!” Rantaro quickly backtracks before sighing. “Well, actually, maybe that is what I meant. You seemed fine before you went down into the tunnels but when you left you seemed really down. I’m not saying Shirogane is a bad person but I thought maybe she managed to say the wrong thing and...”

Kaede shakes her head softly. “Shirogane didn’t upset me at all. In fact, she looked after me whilst we were down there. I just got myself upset because I found a door that looked like an exit and couldn’t even open it. Then again, it was obviously a trap to begin with so...”

“Any one of us would’ve fallen for a trap like that!” Tenko cries as she throws her arms out. “Akamatsu shouldn’t feel ashamed that she fell for it!”

“But Ouma and Amami were smart enough to not even waste their time going into the tunnels,” Kaede points out. She feels her throat tighten again.

“Actually...” Rantaro crosses his arms. “I actually really wanted to explore down there myself and I think Ouma did too. He obviously doesn’t like tight spaces, but he kept denying it when I asked him.”

“Tenko agrees that tight spaces are horrible,” Tenko suddenly says as her entire body shudders. “So Tenko can sort of understand why that degenerate never went down with you both.”

“Oh, I didn’t know you were claustrophobic?” Kaede asks.

Tenko huffs. “Tenko didn’t either! However, the more Tenko thinks about going into a tight tunnel...she feels scared. What if she can’t get out and something bad happens to her? Then she’s trapped!”

“The tunnels were rather spacious actually,” Kaede says. “Although getting down to them might be a problem if you’re claustrophobic.”

“Ughhh, what a nasty bear making things a million time harder than they have to be,” Tenko wails. “If only the rules didn’t exist, then Tenko would’ve broken him into tiny pieces already!”

Kaede smiles genuinely, unable to stop her mouth stretching happily. Although, her smile quickly disappears when she involuntarily lets out a loud yawn. She slaps her hand over her mouth. “Whoops...”

“Ah! Where are Tenko’s manners?!” Tenko gasps. “It’s getting far too late! Tenko will leave you alone now, Akamatsu. Just make sure to keep your door locked so no degenerates can get inside! That includes you too, Amami! You better leave Akamatsu alone so she can get some rest!”

“I will, I will,” Rantaro reassures her. “However, I do have something I want to talk to Akamatsu about in private so...”

Tenko narrows her eyes. “Hmm...”

“Don’t worry, Chabashira, I’ll be fine,” Kaede reassures the other girl. “Please, go to bed. You must be worn out too.”

“That is true but...” Tenko jabs a finger at Rantaro’s chest. “Tenko knows you’re going to be the last person around Akamatsu so if anything happens to her then Tenko will come for you! It’ll be on sight!”

“I promise I’m not going to do anything,” Rantaro says, putting his hands up in mock surrender.

“Chabashira, I’ll be fine,” Kaede says. “Please, go to bed. You deserve some rest.”

“Fine! But if Tenko hears anything then she’ll come running! That’s a promise!”

Kaede and Rantaro watch as the aikido master heads to her own bedroom, closing the door gently. Rantaro lets out a heavy sigh once Tenko is out of sight.

“Man, girls can be scary,” Rantaro mumbles.

“Oh? So do you think I’m scary?” Kaede asks teasingly before tilting her head to the side. “Hey, why did you want to talk to me anyway? Is something wrong?”

“...can we talk inside your room?” Rantaro asks as he looks around at the closed dormitory doors. “I’d prefer it if I could speak to you in private.”

“O-Oh? I guess so?” Kaede nervously steps to the side and allows Rantaro into her bedroom. She closes the door with both of her hands. “So, what is it you wanted to tell me?”

“I wanted to ask you what condition your tablet was in when you woke up here,” Rantaro asks, crossing his arms.

“Is that it?” Kaede lets out a laugh. “For a second I thought that this was going to be something serious.”

“I am being serious,” Rantaro responds.

Kaede feels her stomach drop. “Oh, um, sorry...” She points to her tablet that she left on her desk. “It was fine, I guess. In working condition at least? Oh! It did have a couple of scratches on it though, as if something had been rubbing against it. Why do you ask?”

Rantaro frowns before sighing, his entire body going slack. “I know this isn’t what you want to hear but I really do think that we have all been here before. Not only does the whiteboard prove this but...when I woke up I found my tablet in my pocket and...it was covered in dried up blood.”

“Blood?!” Kaede’s hands fly up. “Actual blood?!”

Rantaro nods. “I washed it off as soon as I saw it since it freaked me out so much but I thought it was weird. Why would my tablet have so much blood on it? I thought that it was a trick or something to scare me but after Ouma and Monokuma showed us the whiteboard and said that we might’ve woken up here before...”

“You thought the blood was real blood?” Kaede asks gently.

“Maybe I am just jumping to conclusions but I get this feeling that we’ve all used our tablets before,” Rantaro says. “You said yours was scratched, right? I know I shouldn’t over think things but with the evidence there is so far, I just feel like...”

Kaede winces. “That this isn’t our first time here...”

“Hey, Akamatsu,” Rantaro says with a firm face. “I know you’re upset. I know I would be too in your position but you’ve got to stay strong. What ever happened in the past is going to stay in the past, got it? Some people might hold what’s on the whiteboard against you for a while but you need to prove them wrong.”

“I’m trying, I really am,” Kaede insists as she wrings her hands. “But think about things from my point of view...”

“Of course, I do see where you’re coming from,” Rantaro says. “Just, take care of yourself, okay? And remember that you’re not alone. We’re all in this together now.”

“Y-Yeah, I know that,” Kaede says before giving Rantaro a grim smile. “But you have to promise that you’ll take care of yourself too. We won’t be able to leave quickly if people aren’t feeling well.”

“Ahaha, you don’t have to worry about me,” Rantaro reassures her before rubbing the back of his head. “It’s late so I should get going now. Just make sure that you keep your door locked tonight. I’m not saying that someone is going to do something but in a situation like this...”

“Yeah, I understand,” Kaede says as she leads him to the door and opens it up. “Goodnight, Amami.”

“See you in the morning,” Rantaro tells her. He smiles and gives her a small wave before he walks away.

The next morning Kaede wakes up to the sound of the monitor in her room turning on. Monokuma wakes up the group with a confused announcement, claiming that he still can't find his kids before reminding the group that the early bird always catches the victim, whatever that means.

She decides to have a shower and change her clothes. She's surprised when she finds a wardrobe full of the exact same shirts, vests and skirts. However, she is grateful that she does have some fresh clothes to change into. Once she's done freshening up, she pulls on her backpack, makes sure her tablet is inside, grabs her keys and leaves the dormitories.

Outside she bumps into Angie, who seems oddly happy despite the entire situation.

“Yoo hoo!” Angie waves her hands as she walks alongside Kaede with a bounce in her step. “God says that today seems like a good day! Don't you think so too, Kaede?”

“Yeah, maybe things are finally going to get better today,” Kaede says. “I suppose it's important to stay optimistic.”

“You suppose so?” Angie laughs. “No, you mean that you have to! Otherwise your sadness is going to swallow you up! Then Angie won't be able to help you get into heaven otherwise! Do you want Angie to pray for you, Kaede? So the sadness goes away?”

“Oh, that's a very nice offer,” Kaede says before smiling. “But I'm fine! I'm just going to keep my chin up and keep looking forward!”

“Despite what happened yesterday?” Angie asks as she puts a paintbrush to her lips. “Oh my, how brave! But Angie meant it yesterday when she said you should be grateful that all your past sins have been washed away! Now we can all start afresh again, even if you did do something super bad before!”

“That's certainly one way to look at things,” Kaede hums. However, she can't help but feel curious. “Is that how you feel about us potentially forgetting things, Angie? That our...sins have been cleansed?”

“God told me so!” Angie reassures her. “God also told me that he reeeeeeeally wants to check out the art room later on today too. He says that all of my favourite art supplies are up there and Angie wants to check them all out!”

“That's lucky!” Kaede responds as they step inside of the school.

Angie smiles warmly. “God also told Angie that there's a room here for everyone too, you know? That we've all been blessed with a room to hone our talents! God says there's a super, really nice big piano for you to play too and he says that you have to play me a song one day!”

“Is this your way of saying you want to hear me play piano?” Kaede asks.

Angie shakes her head. “No, no! God said you should!”

“Perhaps I can play you a song later on today then?” Kaede suggests. “But I do have to visit Chabashira at her dojo too so maybe after that?”

“Angie thinks that is a divine idea!”

They enter the dining room together and Kaede is hit with a mouth watering smell that lulls her towards the table. Kaede eyes all the dishes that have been laid out. Pancakes with golden sticky syrup drizzled over the top, freshly cooked fish that have been sliced into equal pieces, bowls of fluffy white rice in perfect heaps, plates of fruit that have been prepared into cubes, bowls of soup with steam rising from them...

“This looks delicious!” Kaede looks around in surprise. “Who made all of this?”

“That would be me.” Kirumi leaves the kitchen holding a large glass of what looks to be orange juice. “I realised I neglected to ask people what they liked to eat for breakfast yesterday so I decided to prepare a large variety of food. I hope everything is to your liking.”

“There’s no way someone wouldn’t like food like this!” Kaede tells her. “Seriously, this all looks amazing!”

“That reminds me, I also need to take note of what people would like for lunch too...” Kirumi puts a hand to her chin. “I think I have a spare notepad in my bedroom.”

“Oh wow, this looks great!”

Kaito marches into the dining room, leading a group of people. He waves at Kaede.

“Oh, hey, Akamatsu! I knocked on your door but now I get why no one answered! Didn’t know whether to be worried or not but it looks like you’ve managed to pull yourself together!”

“I’m totally feeling better this morning!” Kaede pumps her fists. “But thanks, Momota!”

“Akamatsuuuuu!”

“Huh?!”

Tenko almost crashes into the pianist as she pulls her in for a very impromptu hug. “Tenko got worried when you never answered your door! She was scared something happened! And when Amami said he didn’t know where you were she got really scared!”

“Seriously guys, I’m fine,” Kaede laughs nervously.

So many people are looking out for me even though I don’t really deserve it. We’ve only known each other for under a day yet people like Tenko and Kaito are acting like we’ve all been friends forever! I’m...I’m really happy.

“Akamatsu should sit next to me so we can head straight to the dojo afterwards!” Tenko decides as she pulls Kaede towards a random chair. “Oh! Does Akamatsu have a spare change of clothes? Perhaps some gym clothes?”

“I don’t think so...” Kaede pulls a face. “I didn’t think we were going to do any exercise!”

“We’re not doing any exercise, per se,” Tenko says as she presses two fingers together. “I’m sure we’ll be fine! Tenko will make sure to be extra gentle with you!”

“Extra gentle doing what?” Miu instantly joins the conversation with a smug smile. “Oh, I get it.

You both plan to get wet and sweaty together, emphasis on the wet-”

“I-Iruma!” Tenko flushes. “It’s very unladylike to say things like that!”

“But you’re not denying it,” Miu says with a grin.

“Just ignore her,” Kaede says with a sigh, reaching over the table to grab both Tenko and herself a plate. “Here, let’s start eating.”

More and more people enter the room as the morning continues. Kaede takes note of who is here and who isn’t.

Tsumugi is sitting next to Kiibo and Kiyo after the two started to talk to her. She seems a little disappointed that there’s no seats free next to Kaede. Kaito is talking at Ryoma, who clearly isn’t listening. Angie and Kokichi seem to be in a deep conversation about...something. Kirumi has finally finished bringing in plates and has taken one for the team to talk to Miu, who is gushing about something. Everyone seems to be in the dining room but Gonta.

“Should someone find him?” Rantaro suggests before biting into a strawberry. “Perhaps he got lost.”

“Maybe I should go and search for him?” Kirumi says as she starts to stand up. “After all I’m finished myself so-”

“You still have tea you need to drink, sit down!” Miu retorts as she grabs the maid’s arm and pulls her back onto her chair.

“But if I don’t search for him then who will?” Kirumi frets

Actually, I don’t think Kirumi has anything to worry about. I think I can hear thumping coming from down the hall and there’s only one person here who would walk that loud.

Seconds later Gonta bursts into the room holding a large stone. Everyone is understandably startled as Gonta rushes to the table and drops the stone onto it with a large thump.

“Whatcha got there?” Kaito asks curiously.

“Gonta find this whilst looking for bugs!” Gonta says as he points at the rock. “Gonta thought he should have a quick look around this morning since Gonta likes to do that! Then Gonta find this stone with writing on it but Gonta doesn’t understand what it means? It says This world is mine, Kokichi Ouma!”

“Ouma?” Ryoma raises an eyebrow. “Hey, have you got an explanation for this?”

“Eh?” Kokichi pouts. “I have no idea what you’re on about! Is this a prank, Gonta? Because if so then you totally got me!”

“Gonta got Ouma?” Gonta then shakes his head. “No, this must be Ouma’s doing! He tried to trick everyone yesterday and now he trying to do the same today! What do he mean by owning the world?”

“Kokichi doesn’t look like a god...” Angie puts her hands to her cheeks. “Because Angie’s God says he doesn’t recognise him!”

“It was bad enough yesterday when you tried to split the group up with that whiteboard,” Tsumugi

says darkly. “But to start messing around today too? Aren’t you taking things too far?”

Kokichi looks surprisingly frustrated when he throws his hands up in the air. “Not everything is my fault, you know? What if it’s someone trying to frame me, huh? You’re such a bully, Shirogane!”

“That’s enough,” Kirumi declares before clearing her throat. “Gokuhara, we’re grateful that you brought this to our attention. However, the food is getting cold. Perhaps we should all finish eating before we discuss what the stone actually means?”

“It doesn’t mean anything,” Kokichi insists as he struggles to lift the stone onto his lap. “It’s not even my handwriting! It looks like a kid wrote this, not me! Someone clearly doesn’t like meee!”

“Well it’s not like you’ve gone out of your way to make yourself likeable,” Ryoma points out before tugging on his hat. “But you seem distressed enough to make me think that you’re being genuine for once.”

“I’m not distressed,” Kokichi huffs. “I’m simply disappointed that someone thought this would be a funny prank! If you ask me it’s a stupid one!”

Gonta looks upset as he takes a seat at the table. “Gonta didn’t mean to upset Ouma! Gonta really thought that he was up to no good again!”

“No, you did good, Gonta,” Kaito says before pulling a face. “But something seems wrong.”

“Perhaps I can help out with that!”

“Kyaaa!”

Tsumugi’s scream is probably scarier than Monokuma’s sudden appearance. He stares at the table with delight.

“That looks delicious! Is there anything spare for your dear headteacher?”

“Of course not!” Tenko snaps as she pulls her bowl of rice onto her lap. “Tenko thinks you should go away! She’s still upset with you!”

“What? Did no one like my welcoming present?” Monokuma asks with a snort. “Fair enough! I did think long and hard about it yesterday and I decided that it simply wasn’t good enough!”

“Hell yeah it wasn’t,” Miu grumbles. “What? Are you about to give us all fucking weapons now?”

“No! There’s plenty of those lying around,” Monokuma says dismissively. “However, I have come to announce the very first motive for this killing game!”

“A motive?” Kaede almost chokes on her fruit. “What do you mean you’re giving us a motive!?”

“Well this group just seems so friendly!” Monokuma sighs as he turns blue. “It’s so despairingly disgusting that I can’t take it anymore! I know I said I wanted you all to be friends but this is a little too much so soon!”

“Make up your mind already,” Korekiyo scoffs as he narrows his eyes.

“But I was going to give you this motive regardless of how buddy buddy you all got,” Monokuma reveals. “And with what information that was...leaked yesterday I think this motive ties in perfectly!”

“Well then, are you gonna tell us what it is?” Ryoma asks.

“But of course!” Monokuma chuckles before stretching his arms out. “Now then, this very special motive I’ve prepared for you is called the First Blood Perk! For the first murder that occurs there will be no class trial held! Isn’t that amazing? To simply put it, the first person who murders a classmate will graduate with no strings attached!”

“...no strings attached?” Kokichi echoes with a blink.

“Yesterday was such a tense day,” Monokuma says. “It seems people got sooo wound up about the rules and I didn’t even get the chance to explain them myself! Whilst I do like a class trial myself, just think of this motive as an apology for missing out on my amazing explanation!”

He can't be serious, can he? To offer a motive like this so early on?! This is so dangerous! How low does he think we'll stoop to get out of here?! I know for a fact that I would never kill to leave!

“So what? We just need to kill someone and we get to leave?” Miu asks as sweat starts to trickle down her face.

“Please calm down!” Kiibo pleads. “And don’t put it like that! It makes it sound like you’re actually tempted by his offer!”

“To offer a motive like this...” Korekiyo closes his eyes. “It will certainly test the morals of some people here.”

“Well we don’t want his motive!” Kaede shouts as she jabs a finger at Monokuma. “So just forget it! No one is going to kill to leave! I’ll make sure of it!”

“Oh? Are you personally going to keep an eye on everyone at all times?” Monokuma asks with a sneer. “And shame on you! This is the most generous motive I’ve ever given! You should be grateful that I’m offering something like this!”

“Don’t act like you’re doing us a favour!” Tenko growls.

“How about we just wait and see,” Monokuma responds before waving. “I can’t wait to see how you will all use this motive! Bye bye!”

That...that piece of shit! How dare he try to lure us with such a sick-

“T-This is your fault!”

“Woah, Shirogane, calm down!”

Kaede turns to see Kiibo blocking Tsumugi from lunging at Kokichi. Her mouth drops.

“How is any of this my fault?” Kokichi asks. “It’s not like I asked Monokuma for this!”

“Y-You’re probably behind this!” Tsumugi argues. “If you hadn’t slowed us down yesterday then we would’ve realised we needed to be in the gym! Then Monokuma would’ve explained everything for us a-and you wouldn’t have scared all of us with your stupid whiteboards!”

“Shirogane, I understand that you must be frightened but pointing fingers isn’t going to get us anywhere,” Kirumi tells her with a disgruntled expression. “Please calm down. We need to discuss what to do next as a group.”

“That’s right!” Kaede says. “Please, Shirogane, please just calm down!”

Tsumugi's bottom lip wobbles before she slumps back into her chair, her cheeks turning red. "Ah! I'm, um, I'm so sorry everyone."

"Gonta understand, Gonta upset too," Gonta says before letting out an enthusiastic shout. "But Gonta protect everyone! Gonta no let the motive hurt anyone!"

Kaede swallows.

She agrees with Gonta. There's no way she's letting anyone get hurt over this motive. It's going to be hard but there's no way she's going to let Monokuma get his own way, even if she has to stop this motive from happening with her own two hands.

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 1 Part 4

Chapter Notes

Ahh! Sorry for taking so long to update! I've had a lot on recently so I had to make writing a lower priority. I'm back now though! Hopefully the next chapter won't take as long to be published!

I'm also trying to figure out how long to make future chapters since this fic is already getting ridiculously long and nothing too important has happened yet ahaha. I think when the game officially starts that's when I'm going to perhaps make chapters shorter, such as take out free time events and merge investigations and trials together.

Sorry if there's any mistakes!

Thank you for reading! I hope you all enjoy my writing!

The group decides to hold a meeting at lunch time, meaning Kaede has some free time until then. However, she remembers her promise to Tenko about going to the dojo that is outside with her.

Kaede and Rantaro head to the dojo together. Tenko runs on ahead, telling the two that she wants to make sure that the dojo is in a good enough condition before letting people inside. She also reminds them both to take their shoes off before heading in, which Kaede reminds herself over and over again in her head.

On the way down, she spots Miu and Kiibo heading towards the strange looking building near the garage. She wonders what's inside and mentally reminds herself to maybe explore the school a little more later on.

"I wonder what Chabashira wants to do with us?" Rantaro asks as he slips off his shoes, using the wall to balance himself as he does so.

"I'm not sure," Kaede admits as she takes off her own shoes, neatly leaving them by the door. "But I'm sure things will be fine! After all, I don't think Chabashira is any sort of threat at all. She seems really nice."

Rantaro hums. "I suppose you're right."

"You suppose?"

"Akamatsu, I don't want to scare you but aren't you trusting people a little too easily in a situation like this?" Rantaro asks her. "I'm not saying that it's a completely bad thing but what if you get hurt?"

"Then it'll be my own fault for trusting the wrong people," Kaede says. "But no one so far has given me any reason to distrust them and besides, we're all going to leave together as a group. It'll be awkward if we start pointing fingers at each other. I guess I just don't want people to feel uncomfortable, that's all."

"I see..." Rantaro puts a hand to his chin. "But say...there was someone who wasn't completely

telling the truth and hiding something really serious from us, how would you feel about that?"

"It would depend on what they're hiding," Kaede answers before tilting her head to the side. "Hey, Amami? You're sort of being really cryptic right now. Is there perhaps something you know that I don't?"

"I..." Rantaro pauses. "I do think that there could be someone here who might know more than they're letting on. Although it's more of a hunch than anything. It could just be me being paranoid. How about we just ignore what I just said for now? Sorry for worrying you."

He wants me to ignore what he just said? No offence but how can I ignore a claim like that? Rantaro thinks that someone is...lying to us all? I wonder what he means by that? Does he think that there's someone here who actually knows what is going on and just isn't telling us? If that is the case then that's actually really concerning. However, Rantaro clearly doesn't want to talk more about this either.

"It's fine," Kaede says before smiling. "But if you do see someone acting strange then could you tell me? It could just be that they're feeling nervous, you know?"

"Maybe you're right," Rantaro agrees. "Sorry, maybe I'm the nervous one right now."

"That's okay!" Kaede pumps her fists. "I'm super nervous too but I know as long as we all stick together then nothing bad is going to happen!"

Rantaro opens his mouth to respond but the dojo doors suddenly slide open. Tenko proudly dusts off her hands before putting them on her hips. "Tenko has checked around and has decided that this room is safe to use! You are both now welcome inside!"

Tenko struts inside the building, clearly expecting Kaede and Rantaro to follow behind her. The two give each other a nervous look before stepping inside.

The space inside the dojo is actually rather large. There's several platforms dangling from the ceiling and lots of poles to use as equipment. The floor is also covered in several mats that seem comfortable enough to fight on. Kaede feels her foot sink into a mat when she steps onto it. That's a relief. If Tenko is intending to spar with them both then at least she won't get hurt.

"Welcome to the dojo!" Tenko cries as she excitedly waves her hands around. "Tenko is really impressed that a place like this exists in such a horrible area! Tenko will do her utmost best to keep this place in good condition too! Now, as soon as you're both ready then Tenko would like to try out her technique on you both!"

"What is this technique anyway?" Rantaro asks curiously. "You never specified what you'd be doing to the both of us."

Tenko smiles smugly as she crosses her arms. "Tenko has a super special technique that helps her read her opponents during matches! When a match starts, Tenko tries her best to flip her opponent as soon as possible to figure them out! It has worked every time and Tenko has figured out a lot of people's intentions by doing this!"

"You can read people by flipping them?" Kaede asks in surprise. "How does that work?"

"It's all a part of Tenko's extra special neo aikido technique!" Tenko tells her. "Now, if Akamatsu would like to come a little closer please! Tenko promises that this won't hurt for long!"

"Won't hurt for long?!" Kaede's eyes go wide. She doesn't get the chance to retaliate before Tenko

grabs her carefully before flipping her with a shout. Kaede let's out a yell as the world spins before she lands on a mat with a thud.

“Chabashira, you didn't even ask her if she was okay with being flipped,” Rantaro scolds her sternly as he kneels down to help Kaede up from the mat.

Tenko, however, doesn't listen to him as her face turns soft. “Tenko was right about believing in Akamatsu since Tenko knows that Akamatsu only has pure intentions. However, Tenko also senses that Akamatsu doesn't like to share her burdens with others, which is such a shame as there's plenty of people who want to help her out.”

“Huh?” Kaede blinks as she stops dusting off her skirt.

“However Tenko also sensed that...Akamatsu needs to be careful if she really wants to help everyone out,” Tenko says. “Whilst Tenko knows Akamatsu has pure intentions, she has a feeling that Akamatsu will carry too big of a burden which will lead to some unfortunate events if Akamatsu continues the way she is going.”

“What's that supposed to mean?” Kaede asks nervously.

“Tenko isn't sure yet but...” Tenko suddenly throws out a fist. “Akamatsu should totally do some neo aikido with Tenko one day to balance out her emotions! It's all too obvious that Akamatsu is a good person but good people can do bad things if they start to feel cornered! Doing neo aikido every day will clear your mind of any bad thoughts and will allow you to continue to live an emotion filled life!”

I'm actually really surprised how serious Tenko is. I thought that maybe she was sizing people up to figure out how easily she could take them on in a fight but it seems like she can really get a good read of people and their emotions just by flipping them. But is it true what she's saying about me? That I won't share any burdens? All I want to do is help people...

“Well then, now that Tenko has proved that Akamatsu is a good person...” Tenko prowls towards Rantaro, who backs away.

“Hey there, let's not get too hasty...”

Tenko easily grabs him before flipping him onto the floor with an enthusiastic cry.

“Hmm...” Tenko pauses as she rubs her chin. Her eyes flicker to Kaede momentarily before she starts to talk. “Amami definitely needs to trust people more if he wants to leave with everyone else. Tenko couldn't sense anything extraordinarily bad about him but Tenko also feels that his hesitancy to trust others may become his downfall.”

“You're getting a little too personal, don't you think?” Rantaro says as he rolls his shoulders carefully.

“Tenko thinks you should be grateful that Tenko flipped you at all!” Tenko huffs. “Tenko senses that he's also a typical male and that there's nothing too special about him. Tenko is unsure about his intentions but Tenko also felt something similar about you both. You both definitely need to start opening up to others more, especially in a situation like this! Tenko invites you both to start learning neo aikido here! You both totally need to do something with yourselves!”

Kaede opens and closes her mouth before smiling hesitantly. “Maybe that would be for the best. Thank you for the invitation, Chabashira.”

“It’s no problem!” Tenko happily pumps her fists. “Tenko is already excited at the thought of doing neo aikido with Akamatsu! It’s super easy once you get into it! Tenko promises she’ll be patient when teaching you but it’s also much easier if you just jump into neo aikido head on!”

“As nice as this idea is, I think I’ll pass,” Rantaro admits much to Kaede’s surprise. “I don’t think neo aikido is my thing, no offence of course. You two have fun though.”

“Hmph! Of course a degenerate would decline Tenko’s very generous offer!” Tenko huffs.

“It’s nothing personal,” Rantaro insists before sighing. “But there’s a lot more I could be doing right now instead of doing aikido. But like I said, I hope you both have fun together.”

“Tenko isn’t going to start the training right away!” Tenko rolls her eyes. “But Tenko was thinking that we could head here every morning and train before breakfast! That way our bodies will be ready for the day!”

“Oh, so we’ll have to wake up early every day,” Kaede says with a wince. “I see...”

“It’ll be for the best, Akamatsu!” Tenko reassures her with twinkling eyes. “Tenko promises that you’ll feel better for doing this! And if Akamatsu is also worried about Tenko...hurting her then Tenko promises that she won’t! Things are tough right now, especially with that motive Monokuma gave us but we’ve just got to be tougher! Practicing neo aikido will help too!”

“I know you won’t hurt me,” Kaede says.

Intentionally, anyway. Geez, my shoulders feel really sore now.

“Maybe it’s a good thing for you to learn neo aikido,” Rantaro says. “It could help you defend yourself if you ever need it too. After all, in a place like this it’s probably better to be over prepared than not prepared at all.”

“You’re not supposed to use neo aikido for violence!” Tenko cries in horror. “However, Tenko understands if it is used for self defence! Tenko didn’t think about teaching people it for that reason but Amami makes a really good point! Perhaps Tenko should encourage all of the girls to join her each morning!”

“Ah, perhaps...” Rantaro rubs the back of his head. “But what about the guys?”

“Hmph! I suppose if they behave and respect the dojo then they can join in too!” Tenko huffs. “However, if they do start messing around then Tenko will kick them out right away! Dojos are no place to be messing around in!”

“I suppose having people all in the same area will mean everyone can keep an eye on each other too,” Kaede says before grinning. “Hey, this is actually shaping up to be a really good idea! We should tell everyone about it during lunch!”

“Good call, Akamatsu!” Tenko claps her hands together. “Ooooo, Tenko is starting to get really excited now! Tenko just can’t control herself! She feels like an excited dog who is about to pee everywhere!”

“Oh, that’s, ah, good?” Kaede smiles awkwardly. “You’re a very emotional person, Chabashira.”

“It’s very important that you are able to express yourself whenever you want!” Tenko responds. “So when you’re sad you should cry as much as you want! But when you’re happy you should smile! You’re only going to be hurting yourself by repressing your own feelings! That’s why

Tenko never shies away from showing how she's feeling! Tenko hopes that if everyone does neo aikido with her then they'll all open up too!"

Wow, Tenko really is an inspiration. At first I thought she was a bit too full on but then again, I think our group needs someone like her. Well, at least I need someone like her anyway.

"So, what were you two planning to do now?" Rantaro asks.

"Huh? Are you going somewhere?" Kaede asks.

Rantaro nods as his fingers curl around his tablet. "I have places I want to search, I guess. But no offence to either of you but I'd rather, well, look around on my own before lunch."

"Oh! That's okay," Kaede says. "But are you sure that's safe? What if..."

"I highly doubt someone is going to do something drastic so early on," Rantaro reassures her. "If it eases your mind, I'll be down in the basement if you want to know where I should be. I'd appreciate it if I got some privacy but if either of you need me for whatever reason then you'll be able to find me down there."

"Don't worry, Akamatsu! Tenko won't leave you," Tenko reassures the blonde. "Unlike this degenerate!"

"It's not like that..." Rantaro sighs. "But is it okay if I get going? I'm not sure what time lunch is going to be and I'd rather not run out of time."

"It's fine! You get going!" Kaede says. "We'll see you at lunch?"

"Yeah, of course."

Rantaro leaves the dojo with a wave. Even though she hasn't done anything, Kaede feels like she's done something wrong. She wrings her hands together in worry.

"Tenko is actually glad that he's gone," Tenko says suddenly before turning to Kaede. "Um, Akamatsu, there's something Tenko didn't say when she was talking about him and Tenko really thinks you'll want to hear this."

"Huh?" Kaede's eyes widened. "Is it something bad? About Amami?"

"Tenko isn't sure whether to count this as good or bad but..." Tenko presses two fingers together, clearly nervous about something. "Tenko knows that Amami is hiding something. She isn't sure what it is yet but Tenko has never felt someone be so...guarded before. Whilst Tenko got some sort of idea about him, she's not sure how much she really figured out about Amami."

"That's..." Kaede frowns. "Really concerning. You had a lot to say about me too."

Tenko nods. "Tenko knows she has a bad rep when it comes to talking about guys but this time Tenko really is worried. She didn't get any bad vibes from him but Tenko really thinks that he should be a little more open. If he doesn't trust any of us or allows anyone to get close then..."

"Thank you for telling me this, Chabashira," Kaede says before grimacing. "This is definitely something we both need to keep in mind, just in case. I'm not sure how we'll be able to get him to open up but..."

"Tenko will leave that up to you!" Tenko tells her. "After all, it's pretty obvious that Amami likes

you just a little more than anyone else here!”

“What makes you say that?” Kaede asks, raising an eyebrow. “I haven’t noticed anything!”

“Well he did check on you last night to make sure you’re okay,” Tenko says. “Amami seems a little less degenerate than all the other guys but that doesn’t mean Tenko won’t kick his ass if he does anything to upset you though!”

How reassuring...

“But even so,” Tenko hums before pouting. “Tenko is feeling so frustrated that she wasn’t able to get a good read on him! This doesn’t usually happen!”

“Well it’s like you said, he seems really guarded,” Kaede says. “So it’s up to us to help him open up!”

“Ah! Akamatsu really does have a pure heart!” Tenko swoons. “Anyway, what is Akamatsu going to do now until lunch? We still have a little free time left. Do you want Tenko to escort you anywhere?”

“Oh! I actually promised Angie I would play a song for her on my piano,” Kaede tells her excitedly. Her fingers start to twitch. “She said that she was going to the art room so she should be upstairs! We should go and find her and ask her if she wants me to play now!”

“Tenko thinks that is a great idea!” Tenko’s eyes sparkle. “Can Tenko join in too? She’s never heard an Ultimate play music live before!”

“Of course!”

They both find Angie inside of the art room and take her downstairs. Tenko seems extremely excited whilst Angie’s excitement is a little more contained. However, Kaede sees the small smile on Angie’s face as the group of girls head down the stairs.

The piano room is beautiful. In a sense, Kaede does think for a moment that all the sheets of music on the floor are a little disrespectful and she does think about picking them up but leaves them. In a way they kind of look really nice too in a decorative sort of way. She makes sure not to step on any of them however as she heads over to the piano.

I suppose it won’t hurt to take a little break before our meeting. I think playing the piano will also really calm me down! Now, what song would be a good song to play right now? I’m not sure what sort of music either Tenko or Angie are into. I suppose I could try and ask them what song they’d like me to play but I’m not sure if they actually know any music in the first place. Hmm...

“How does Akamatsu know how to play an instrument so big?!” Tenko stares at the piano in fascination. “Tenko knows for a fact that she’d struggle to play anything on something so confusing looking!”

“Perhaps Kaede has someone guiding her?” Angie suggests with a grin. “Perhaps Kaede worships the same God as Angie and he too guides her to create beautiful art?”

“Ah, no! Sorry, it’s nothing like that,” Kaede responds sadly. “I’ve played piano ever since I was a little kid and I guess I just loved playing so much I never stopped. Every moment of free time I had I spent on the piano. I ended up winning a lot of competitions but I also became known as the

Piano Freak.”

“P-Piano Freak?!” Tenko growls. “Tell Tenko everyone who called you that so she can go and beat them up! There’s no need to call someone by such an insulting name!”

“It’s fine, I’ve gotten used to it,” Kaede says with a giggle. “It really doesn’t bother me anyway. As long as no one stops me from playing the piano then I’m happy with whatever I’m called really.”

“That’s right,” Angie agrees, clasping her hands together. “As long as you can continue to use your talent for the greater good then whatever people say about you is like water off a duck’s back! Tenko shouldn’t be so hasty with threatening people, you know?”

“Tenko wasn’t threatening!” Tenko opens and closes her mouth before sighing. “But Tenko also doesn’t agree with bullying!”

Kaede smiles as she settles herself down in front of her piano. She carefully runs her fingers across the piano keys one by one. Yeah, this really is a good piano. She can’t wait to start playing.

“Did you both have a song in particular you wanted to hear?” Kaede asks as she waits expectantly. She can feel her fingers twitch. There’s so many songs she wants to play right now! She can’t help but feel impatient as Tenko and Angie look at each other before shrugging.

“Tenko doesn’t actually know any songs,” Tenko admits. “She’s happy to hear anything!”

“Angie agrees, God currently has no requests right now. Although he does want to hear something beautiful!”

“Something beautiful, huh?” Kaede hums as she begins to press down on a couple of keys before closing her eyes.

She doesn’t realise she’s playing until several notes in. She imagines the situation she’s in, of waking up inside of a cold locker. Being trapped inside of a school and being told that she has to kill to leave. Having a bear laugh at her as he tells her that she’s dangerous. Being given such a dangerous motive so early into the killing game. Kaede frowns as her fingers fly across the keys, crashing into them perfectly.

Oh, it seems that I’m playing Moonlight Sonata by Beethoven. It’s a rather sad song when you listen to it but it gets gradually more chaotic the longer it goes on for. Does this song really fit the situation everyone is in? I mean the situation is extremely depressing the more you think about it. Not only are we told to kill each other but we also have to be friends too? What sort of sadistic bullshit does Monokuma get off on anyway? Like hell am I going to give him the satisfaction of hurting anyone.

Kaede’s eyes flutter close as she reaches the second movement of the song.

But we will get out of here together. I don’t care if I end up repeating myself over and over and over again. There’s no motive Monokuma can throw my way that will ruin this feeling I’m experiencing! As long as we all work together then we can leave!

She misses Tenko’s gasps of awe and Angie’s sparkling eyes as she continues to play, completely lost in the music. Kaede smiles as her fingers rapidly hit the keys, feeling some sort of relief as she reaches the third movement of the song. Chaos. Finally, something fast paced to get her feeling pumped up! She continues to play the song with ease, despite the very intense difficulty of it.

When she finishes she finally opens her eyes and takes in a deep breath she knows she deserves.

Tenko starts clapping frantically whilst Angie stares at the piano in amazement.

“Wow, that was so good, Akamatsu!” Tenko squeals as she pumps her fists. “Tenko has never seen someone move their hands so fast! Tenko really wants you to join her in neo aikido now!”

“No, no! Angie thinks Kaede would be a fine artist!” Angie insists, her bracelet bouncing up and down her thin wrist as the girl jumps up and down. “Kaede must join Angie in the art room one day so we can create something together! Kaede mustn’t worry though, even God knows that she’s very talented!”

Kaede flushes. “Thank you both so much! However, I’m happy with just playing piano for now!”

“Maybe Akamatsu could teach us a song?” Tenko asks nervously. “Tenko doesn’t know if she’ll be any good at playing the piano but she would at least like to try!”

“Angie also thinks that would be a divine idea!” Angie agrees as she slides onto the seat next to Kaede. “Now, what song should Angie try to learn!”

“Um...” Kaede tries to think. A simple song that would be easy for Tenko and Angie to learn? “Oh! What about Flea Waltz! That’s a fairly simple song that I think the two of you will get the hang of quick enough! How about I play it first and then you both try to copy after!”

“Okay! I’m ready!” Tenko cries out enthusiastically as she bounds over to the piano.

Kaede takes a deep breath before smiling. This song is so easy that she doesn’t even need to look at the piano, although it’s not like she was even looking at the piano when she was playing Moonlight Sonata either.

She plays the first couple of notes easily enough but then feels something...wrong as she tries to continue.

My neck suddenly feels really, really tight, like there’s something cold and metal wrapped around it and I can’t get it off. It hurts, it really hurts. I want it to stop now please. How do I make it stop?

Her fingers tremble as her hands crash down onto the piano and she winces when she unmistakably hits all the wrong notes one after another. Her head starts to hurt and her throat burns and there’s tears in the corner of her eyes as she grits her teeth because there’s a tight pain around her neck she can’t get rid of. She can’t get it to go away.

For a moment she sees something horrifying. A flashback? A memory? A nightmare? She’s being dragged across a large grand piano that’s wrapped in roses and thorns. Her legs are throbbing as she’s dangled up and down over and over again, hitting piano keys with her feet as a song is played horribly. There’s a rope pulling her up and down. The only time she can breathe is when she lands on the piano but she never gets the chance to savor the moment before she’s cruelly dragged back up and flung to the next key. Over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and-

She feels something warm wrap around her and her chin rests on someone’s shoulder. She sees a lot of yellow and white and distantly thinks that Angie must be nearby or close or far away or just, somewhere. She closes her eyes and howls as someone rubs her back soothingly. There’s someone whispering something into her ear and there’s someone else talking rather quickly and worriedly.

Kaede wonders if she can pull herself out of this fear but it’s so scary and real that she doesn’t think she can. Her entire body feels cold and stiff, like she’s dead or...

“Kaede? Kaedeee? Yoohoo!” Angie starts babbling. “Angie isn’t a scientist but she does know that breathing is sort of a necessity to live, you know? But, but, maybe this is something Kaede does before playing a song? Sometimes Angie holds her breath when she finishes creating something that took ages buuut...”

“She clearly isn’t doing this on purpose!” Tenko retorts. “Akamatsu! Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth! It’s very important that you follow Tenko right now! Can you do that for Tenko, please?”

Kaede notices Tenko crouching down in front of her and watches as the aikido master opens and closes her mouth. She struggles to follow along at first but it soon gets easier. The room slowly stops being a blur. Kaede continues to breathe as she slowly realises that there’s been a hand rubbing up and down her back the entire time. Angie. The smaller girl is breathing loudly like Tenko too.

“There we go! Easy peasy!” Tenko says as she puts her hands on her knees, still crouching in front of the pianist. “But Akamatsu should maybe sit still for a couple of minutes. She looks really tired out.”

“I’m...I’m fine, thank you,” Kaede responds as she clears her throat and straightens her back. “I’m, um, really sorry. I don’t know what happened.”

“Perhaps Kaede is feeling overwhelmed?” Angie suggests before giving the piano a strange look. “Buuut maybe this might make Kaede feel better? When Angie stepped into the art room she suddenly felt really scared too! Which is super strange because Angie loves art! Her God had to calm her down and reassure her that everything was okay! But Angie also made sure that both of her locks were extra tight!”

“What do you mean you got scared? Was there something in the room?” Tenko asks.

Angie shakes her head. “No, no! Well, yes but...” Angie puts a paintbrush to her lips. “Angie found these wax figures of some of us in the art room but they disappeared when she blinked! There was Kaede and Ryoma and Kirumi! Which is a very strange group of people! Buuut they were all also dangling from the ceiling and it was really weird!”

“Um, Tenko doesn’t want to accuse you of lying but...” Tenko frowns. “Tenko doesn’t remember seeing any of these statues you’re on about when she checked the room when she first came here.”

“I don’t really remember seeing any either,” Kaede says softly.

Angie blinks before laughing. “How strange! They totally disappeared too when Angie went to look at them again which is super weird! Because Angie saw them and then she saw that the floor was covered in, um, pink paint! Yes! It had to be pink paint because Angie remembers that she was lying in it at one point! Perhaps she was doing body painting?”

Could it be that Angie experienced that same thing I did when I started playing...that song? But unlike me she seems so unfazed by her experience. Did I overreact or something? How embarrassing.

“Maybe God just wanted to give me inspiration so he showed me what he wanted to see,” Angie suggests quickly. “Nyahaha! How divine! Perhaps he wants me to create statues of us all!”

“But why would he want that?” Kaede asks.

“You know?” Angie tilts her head to the side. “Because, because!”

“It’s a little strange that there were only three statues too,” Tenko says. “Tenko wonders why those three were made into statues in particular? And why were they upside down?”

“Um, Angie doesn’t have an answer for that and God has gone for a nap,” Angie tells Tenko before shrugging. “But he did say before he left that we should all leave this room and get some lunch so Kaede can get some of her energy back!”

Is this her subtly trying to distract me? If so then I really appreciate it. I don’t think I’ve been so stressed out in my life. I thought I’d be a lot calmer than this if I were to ever end up in a situation like this but I keep just freaking out or become really sad for no reason. I need to get a grip. Come on, Kaede! You can do this!

“Angie is right!” Tenko agrees firmly. “Let’s head down to the dining hall! Tenko wants to get some good seats for us all! We should all totally sit together too! So Tenko can protect you both from Monokuma and all of the boys!”

“What a good idea!” Angie agrees as she grabs Kaede’s hand and tugs. “C’mon! Let’s gooo!”

The table is covered in delicious food once again made by Kirumi.

Everyone ends up in the dining room, although some people arrive later than others. Kaede had been one of the first people to arrive along with Tenko and Angie. The only other person that had been in the room when they arrived was Korekiyo, who had been in the middle of a conversation with Kirumi.

Kaede delicately nibbles on a piece of bread as she thinks. No one has decided to bring up the topic of the motive yet. She can tell a couple of people have wanted to say something, like Tsumugi and Kaito. Yet...it seems no one is brave enough or wants to acknowledge that they all have something so dangerous to deal with.

Thankfully, Kirumi brings up that they should be having a meeting whilst also reminding everyone to also dig into their food.

“Gonta knows that the motive is dangerous but,” Gonta tilts his head to the side, “Gonta is also confused as to how we’re going to ignore it? Motive isn’t actually a thing we can touch so as long as we don’t think about it then it won’t be dangerous!”

“Hah, fat chance,” Miu responds as she slams her cup of juice down onto the table. A splatter of pink lands onto the surface. “I know all of you are thinking about cashing in on that motive! I’m going to be sleeping with one eye open from now the fuck on.”

“But are any of us really capable of killing just to leave?” Tsumugi asks before taking a deep breath. “I don’t think that’s right. I know it’s not as simple as promising each other that we won’t kill but as long as this is the only motive that Monokuma is going to give us then I think things will be okay.”

“That’s right!” Kaito agrees. “Besides, there still could be an exit to find!”

“Have you thought about what could possibly happen if we don’t find an exit?” Korekiyo suggests. “Now, it’s a little presumptuous to think that everyone here isn’t tempted to get out of here. After all, we’ve been offered a free kill. Once that free kill has been taken then a lot more work will be required to leave.”

“Not all of us think like psychopaths,” Tenko growls as she pulls a face. “Tenko wants to leave just as much as anyone else here but she won’t hurt anyone either!”

“I am simply saying that we should all be wary,” Korekiyo tells her. “I won’t lie, I did briefly think about how useful this motive is. I think a lot of people would be lying if they said they didn’t think about killing to leave too, even for just a second.”

“But that’s normal,” Ryoma counters. “Of course people are going to think about the motive. It’s whether they kill someone or not that matters.”

“Heeey, you’ve killed before, right?” Angie says. “Won’t you be able to tell if someone is acting super suspicious?”

“I’m not a mind reader,” Ryoma sighs. “Besides, it’s not like murderers plan out what they’re going to do outloud.”

“Perhaps we should have some sort of system put in place?” Kirumi suggests. “Such as we could all move around in groups until Monokuma makes the motive void?”

Miu rolls her eyes. “That’s a dumb fucking idea. What if you get paired up with some crazy person?! And even if you’re in a group of three maybe two people might decide to double team someone and they get fucked over so hard that-”

“I simply don’t think an idea like that is realistic,” Kiibo says as he puts a hand to his chin. “Monokuma will surely notice that something is up and perhaps give us an additional motive that’ll increase the chance of someone killing.”

“Won’t that happen anyway if someone doesn’t die soon?” Kokichi asks. “I mean it’s not like Monokuma is going to be patient forever, you know? He’s just going to keep throwing more and more stuff at us until someone snaps. Did no one else even consider this?”

“Angie did,” Angie says. “But God told her that everything will work out in the end so she’s not worried!”

“Maybe we should keep trying to find an exit,” Kaede says. “The motive won’t apply to us if we’re not here!”

“And we’re legally allowed to leave the school if Monokuma doesn’t turn up in fifteen minutes,” Kokichi says before rolling his eyes. “Did yesterday not prove anything to you? There’s no exit!”

“Maybe we could start digging? Like moles!” Gonta suggests. “The glass wall can’t go that deep since there’s tunnels! All we need to do is find some shovels and-”

“I’m not sure if that’s a good idea,” Kirumi says gently. “After all, I’m not sure how pleased Monokuma would be if we started to destroy school property.”

“I don’t see any rules about digging holes anywhere!” Kaito responds as his eyes light up. “Yeah! How about we find some shovels and-”

Ping!

Kaede raises an eyebrow as her tablet lights up.

“Oh, there’s a new rule!” Tsumugi says as she reads from her tablet. “Students are forbidden from damaging school property. This includes breaking walls, digging holes and so on. Any student

caught purposefully damaging school property will be punished.”

“The fuck?!” Miu looks around wildly. “Are we being listened to?!”

“That does seem to be the case,” Korekiyo says. “How peculiar. I haven’t noticed any listening devices anywhere.”

“Is he in the room somewhere?” Angie suggests as he pokes her head under the table. “Hmm, he’s not under there so Angie doesn’t know where Monokuma could be to listen in on us! How sad!”

“I’m not surprised that Monokuma has a way of keeping track of us all,” Kirumi says before shuddering. “However it is unpleasant to think that he’s got eyes and ears on us wherever we go.”

“What? So he can watch us as we...as we s-shit too?!” Miu trembles. “F-Fuck that!”

Ryoma tugs on his hat as he swirls his spoon around in his hand. “Maybe we’ve been thinking about the motive wrong.”

“Huh?” Kaede blinks. “What do you mean, Hoshi?”

“Are you perhaps thinking that there’s a loophole?” Rantaro asks curiously.

“Yeah, maybe there is,” Ryoma says as he glances around the table. “No matter how you look at the motive, we’ve been given a very generous freebie. Perhaps we shouldn’t waste it.”

“Are you suggesting that...we need to resort to murder?” Kaede’s eyes widened in alarm. “No! No way!”

“Why would you even suggest that?!” Tenko adds before clenching her fists. “You do realise what situation we’re in, right?! Once someone is dead then that’s it! There’s no coming back!”

“Calm down,” Ryoma says before sighing. “You’re both getting a little too ahead of yourselves. I’m simply suggesting that perhaps someone here might willingly offer themselves up so someone else can leave and look for help. That’s all.”

“But that still means someone has to die!” Kaede retorts and slams a hand on the table. “I won’t allow that!”

“Buuut you know...” Kokichi raises an eyebrow. “Sometimes necessary sacrifices do have to be made for the greater good and it’s not like any of us are friends now, are we?”

“You might not be friends with anyone here but I am!” Tsumugi argues. “And you can’t put that sort of pressure on someone to ask them to just...die! I agree with Akamatsu! I won’t allow a murder to happen!”

“I think we all need to take a step back and think things through properly,” Rantaro says with a frown. “Let’s not be too hasty. We’ve only been here a day, after all. It’s far too soon to jump to any conclusions. There still could be a way out we just haven’t found yet.”

“I mean, I think you have to be pretty desperate to still think that there’s an exit,” Kokichi responds. “Weren’t you down in the library a little while ago pulling on books? Are you so frantic to get out of here that you’ve resorted to the oldest trick in the book?”

“Have you been spying on me?” Rantaro asks incredulously.

“Nope! Everyone’s locations are on the map!” Kokichi tells him as he gestures to his own tablet.

“Have a look yourself if you don’t believe me!”

“But that doesn’t explain how you know he was pulling on books,” Angie says.

“Oh, that’s because I was watching him,” Kokichi tells her. “I mean, I did say hello and everything but I was ignored! How rude!”

“You should’ve at least tried harder to let me know you were there,” Rantaro sighs. “It’s bad enough that Monokuma is watching us at all times. I don’t need you joining him.”

“We’re moving off topic,” Kaede says before taking a deep breath. “Hoshi, I sort of get where you’re coming from but I won’t allow your idea to happen. There’s simply no one here who would agree to die in the first place and asking someone to...to sacrifice themselves is out of the question.”

“Are you sure about no one wanting to die?” Ryoma asks curiously.

“Hoshi, what are you implying?” Kirumi asks with narrowed eyes. “You’re not suggesting that you’re offering yourself up, are you?”

“It was just a suggestion, that’s all,” Ryoma says. “Besides, it’s not like I’m going to have much of a life to live if I do leave anyway. It’ll be straight back to another prison for me.”

“But forcing someone else to get blood on their hands...” Tenko shudders. “Did you ever think about that, Hoshi? Someone will have to live with the guilt of killing you. That’s not okay.”

“...I suppose you have a point,” Ryoma says. “Although if things get dangerous then perhaps people should keep my idea in mind. Like I said, I’m fine with whatever. However, you all still have a ways to go if you think the killing game is going to stop so easily.”

“But isn’t it obvious that the game isn’t going to end any time soon?” Kokichi asks. “I mean, from the looks of things maybe we’ve already been in a game before but were made to forget it. Who knows how much we’ve forgotten about? But I do think that it’s pretty obvious that we’ve all been here at least once before.”

“So what? Are you saying that Monokuma is going to restart the game over and over until he’s satisfied?” Kaede asks.

“No, I don’t think that’s right either,” Kokichi responds. “Maybe it’s more so that...”

“God says we’re stuck in some sort of in between,” Angie interjects. “He says we’re neither dead or alive right now.”

“S-So where the hell are we?” Kaito argues as his eyes go wide. “We’re not dead! Shut up!”

“I don’t think we’re dead either,” Tsumugi says. “However, I do think that something is plainly suspicious. There’s three of us missing and we don’t remember who they are. However, I also think that perhaps we have met the missing students before.”

“I wouldn’t put it past Monokuma being able to make us forget things,” Kirumi says. “Although I suppose a lot of our ideas are merely speculation for now. We simply do not have any sort of proof to figure much out at the moment.”

“All we can do is ignore the motive and find a way out,” Kaede says. “I think that’ll be the best for everyone.”

“And when will you get it through your thick skull that there’s no exit?” Kokichi asks. “What’s the plan then, huh? When are you going to stop looking for an exit that clearly doesn’t exist?”

“Hey! Don’t talk to Akamatsu like that!” Tenko snaps.

“I’ll think of something else if it turns out there really is no exit,” Kaede says. “However it’s important to remain optimistic-”

“Don’t you mean realistic?” Kokichi corrects.

“I am being-”

“No offence, Akamatsu, but nothing about what you’re saying seems realistic,” Ryoma says. “I heard that the tunnels proved fruitless-”

“T-There was a door!” Kaede bites back. “I saw it! You did too, Shirogane! Tell them that there’s a door down there!”

“There was a door,” Tsumugi hesitantly agrees. “But Akamatsu-”

“As long as there’s...there’s proof that an exit exists then I’m getting us out of here! Alive!” Kaede shouts. She feels her face turn red with determination. It’s not as if she’s flushed or embarrassed. She’s desperate, as if repeating the same sentence of ‘I will get us all out of here’ will actually save everyone.

“I mean, you’ve kinda already said that like over and over again already,” Kokichi says as he starts to check his nails. “It’s getting a little boring.”

Kaede’s eye twitches. “Well aren’t you supposed to be some sort of leader?! Why the hell aren’t you doing anything? Unless your talent is just a lie along with your personality?”

She thinks she should feel more satisfied when Kokichi almost knocks his drink over in surprise. He sneers at her. “Do you really think you’re going to get everyone out of here with that attitude? Oh look at me! I’m Miss Akamatsu who bleats about friendship and leaving together but as soon as someone opposes me I bully them into silence!”

“That’s-”

“Do you really want some advice? From a real leader?” Kokichi asks as he stands up from his chair, eyeing the door so he can make his leave. “Get a grip. This game is happening whether you want it to or not. Stop thinking about how you’re going to outsmart Monokuma and start thinking about how you’re going to beat the killing game.”

He darts from the room before Kaede can even respond. Her mouth opens and closes like a fish and her hands tremble by her sides. She can’t help but feel like she’s messed up somehow.

But he’s right. I kept on prattling about leaving together as a group but I’ve also been nothing but mean to him from the get go. It’s not just me, everyone has been really abrupt with him too. The only person who seems to be slightly on his side is Ryoma and that’s because he’s been thinking...realistically too. I guess I was so desperate to find a way out of here that I wouldn’t even allow myself to think that a murder might possibly happen. Several murders. I...I really don’t know anyone here. I was under the presumption that everyone would think like me and would never think about killing someone else. How could I have been so naive?

“Um...” Tsumugi licks her lips nervously. “Akamatsu, are you okay? He was being pretty harsh-”

“No, I needed to hear that,” Kaede instantly responds as she clenches and unclenches her fists. “I, um, I don’t think he’s wrong. It’s...ah...”

“He didn’t have to be so rude about it,” Kaito huffs.

“But he does unfortunately have a point,” Kiibo says. “As much as it pains me to say this, I do think this game is going to happen, intentionally or not. I truly don’t think any of us here are murderers but it’s easy to say that we’ll never kill when we’ve not been put in a high pressure situation before that might require us to.”

“It takes a lot of guts to kill too,” Ryoma adds. “But Monokuma seems like the type of...bear to use mind games to screw us all over. Even this motive feels like a trap.”

“It sort of feels like...like it’s not the full motive,” Tsumugi says carefully. “It’s too generous of a motive to let someone walk free so easily. I’m not trying to scare anyone here but...”

“How easy do you reckon it is to just, well, destroy Monokuma?” Rantaro asks suddenly. “I mean, wouldn’t that solve a lot of our problems?”

“You just want to up and kill him?” Ryoma raises an eyebrow. “Have you read the rules?”

“Amami, isn’t that a little too extreme?” Kaede asks him. “I mean I get that getting rid of him would sort out a lot of problems but I don’t want to break any of the rules just yet either.”

Rantaro fiddles with a ring on his finger. “Haha, you’re right. I guess I was just throwing around ideas. But maybe it’s something we could keep in mind? After all, it might buy us a little more time if we get rid of him.”

“And we wouldn’t have to worry about him hurting us too,” Tenko hums thoughtfully. “Hmm...”

“Have any of you even read the rules?!”

Ah, here comes Monokuma. What a surprise.

The black and white bear puts his paws on his hips as he glowers at the group. “Don’t discuss killing me without a care in the world! I put you all in this killing game and I can easily take you all back out!”

“Oh! Yes please!” Gonta smiles. “Phew! What a relief! Now we can all go home!”

“I don’t, ah, think he meant it like that,” Kiibo tells the gentle giant carefully.

“Now if my kids were here then I’d give you all a taste of what my Exisals can do!” Monokuma grumbles. “However, it seems for whatever reason they’re not here anymore! Which is strange because I always buy them in bulk so I should have plenty of kids!”

“You buy your kids?” Kirumi blinks.

“I mean, maybe there was a last minute change and they were dismissed,” Monokuma grumbles. “Maybe it was realised that I’d be enough for the killing game! Who needs mascots when you’ve got the original!? No one or nothing could ever trump me! I’m Monokuma!”

“Um...” Angie wrinkles her nose. “What are you on about? Angie is very confused!”

“I think we all are,” Korekiyo says. “Do you have something important to say or are you here to complain?”

“I’m here to scold you all for even thinking about getting rid of me!” Monokuma growls. “In fact, I should put it in the rules that even thinking about harming me is punishable by death! Perhaps I’ll cut out the tongue of the next person who talks about harming your poor old headteacher!”

“N-Not the tongue!” Miu whimpers. “Anything but the tongue!”

“Everyone, chill out,” Rantaro says before sighing heavily. “I was the one who suggested getting rid of you first. Leave them out of it.”

“I am very well aware of that,” Monokuma replies before sighing. “Honestly I’m not even surprised. Oh look, Ultimate Who Gives A Damn is taking a stand. You know, this sort of behaviour usually happens at the end of a game, not at the start. Maybe you should pipe down before you get yourself killed. It’d be such a shame if you died before you remember your talent. After all, people love a good mystery!”

“Make up your mind already!” Tenko cries as she clutches her head. “You’re making Tenko so confused! First you want us to kill each other but then you want us to make friends but then you’re saying we’re making friends too quick and now you’re encouraging people not to die? What sort of game are you running?!”

“Not a very good one,” Kirumi answers.

“Things will get better later on!” Monokuma all but wails. “It’s always the first kill that is the hardest to encourage! I mean, I really do get where you’re all coming from! That’s why I gave you all such a generous motive-”

“How long is this motive going to last anyway?” Ryoma asks. “Soon enough you’re going to lose your patience, right?”

“Oh yeah, definitely,” Monokuma agrees. “But once I hand out a motive then it’s valid until the next motive! Unless said otherwise, of course. Like I said, I’m a very generous bear. Sometimes I’ll hand out additional motives when needed, you know, for the extra push.”

“I see,” Kirumi murmurs as she puts a hand to her chin. “So if we don’t accept this motive then-”

“I have another one lined up!” Monokuma reassures her. “But, I’m a fair bear. I’ll give the group, let’s say, until tomorrow to take me up on my once in a lifetime offer before revealing the next motive.”

Ah, I guess I didn’t think that Monokuma could introduce additional motives. I wonder what he has lined up for us?

“Only until tomorrow?” Tsumugi hugs herself tightly. “That’s too soon! There’s no way that someone will kill so early on!”

“That’s right!” Kaito rolls up his sleeves. “In fact, I’m starting to get really pissed off with all of this! Who the hell do you think you are thinking you can control all of us?! Do you think some shitty motives are going to control us? Screw that!”

“Temper, temper,” Monokuma tuts as he wags his paw from side to side. “Careful now, Momota. You might get someone killed if you act out now.”

“Tsk, I was just saying,” Kaito says, although if looks could kill then Monokuma would be six feet under.

Tsumugi trembles as she picks up her steaming hot cup of tea. “Perhaps it’s for the best if we all just...we all just calm down. We’ve ignored this motive so far! We can probably just ignore the next one too!”

“Yeah, you’re probably right,” Kiibo agrees.

“Let’s just ignore Monokuma for now,” Tsumugi says before sipping on her tea. She wrinkles her nose. “Ah, this is much too hot! There’s milk in the kitchen, right?”

“Let me grab it,” Kirumi offers as she abruptly stands up.

Tsumugi shakes her head as she stands up a little too quickly. “No, it’s fine! I can get it myself. It’s just this way-”

The blue haired girl screeches as she seemingly trips on air itself, throwing her hot cup of steaming tea all over Monokuma. She drops the cup on the floor in shock as she stumbles backwards, throwing her hands over her mouth as Monokuma goes scarily still.

“Oh...oh no...” Tsumugi looks at the group, giving Kaede in particular a very scared look.

Monokuma twitches before going still. Very still.

“Um...” Angie puts her hands to her cheeks. “Angie doesn’t know what to say! Did he just turn himself off?”

“I think I just killed Monokuma,” Tsumugi gasps in horror, her back hitting the dining room table. “I’m going to be in so much trouble...”

“It was an accident,” Tenko tells her. “And it was only Monokuma anyway!”

“Getting rid of him was as easy as spilling hot water on him?” Korekiyo blinks. “Oh my, how perplexing. I thought it would’ve taken a lot more to damage him at least.”

“Perhaps he doesn’t bode well with heat?” Kirumi suggests as she reluctantly prods the bear with her shoe. “He doesn’t seem to be reacting to anything either. Perhaps Shirogane managed to fry his wiring perhaps?”

“Whatever she did, it worked really well!” Kaito declares in awe. “Now we don’t have to worry about Monokuma and his dumbass rules!”

But is that right? I’m not so sure if things are going to end so easily. After all, maybe Monokuma isn’t really broken or maybe he just needs a couple of hours to reboot. Things ending now just seem a little too...easy.

“Well would you look at that...” Rantaro murmurs to himself, raising his eyebrow at Tsumugi. “He’s gone and no one was hurt in the process.”

“I swear it was just an accident!” Tsumugi wails. “What if he wakes up and punishes me?!”

“We’ll just tell him we didn’t see a thing,” Kaito reassures her. “Besides, we’ll all be long gone when he returns.”

“If he even returns at all,” Kiibo says before sniffing. “Water is very damaging for robots! However, my professor made sure all my metal was waterproof so I could participate in human activities like swimming!”

“That’s fucking cool and all but what the hell are we going to do with Monokuma?” Miu asks. “I say we break the fucker so he has no chance of coming back!”

“You mean like this?” Gonta asks, picking up the bear and squeezing. Monokuma’s entire body shudders before it cracks apart, robotic limbs falling to the floor. “Oh! Monokuma is very easy to break! Maybe Gonta should’ve tried to break him earlier!”

“Nah, don’t think that would’ve been smart,” Ryoma says. “Who knows what he would’ve done if you tried to break him and failed.”

“Hoshi probably right,” Gonta agrees before smiling. “But now that Monokuma gone, does that mean the game is over? We don’t have to play it if no one is running it, right?!”

“That should be the case!” Tenko squeals excitedly. “Oooh, this is so exciting! Tenko has never felt more relieved in her life!”

“But is the game really over?” Kaede finds herself thinking out loud. She slaps a hand over her own mouth. “I, um...”

“Hey, what’s up Akamatsu?” Kaito asks in surprise. “Aren’t you happy? Monokuma is gone now! We can find a way out of here without being punished now!”

“Don’t tell me you wanted to play the game after all?” Korekiyo suggests. “I never thought you were the type.”

“Of course I’m happy that the game is over!” Kaede cries. “But something feels off. It’s just, if Monokuma is really gone for good then it feels like we won a little too easily.”

“I understand where you’re coming from,” Kirumi tells her. “However, we should accept these sort of victories with haste. We should take advantage of Monokuma not being around and start making our own exit.”

“That’s right!” Tenko agrees. “Tenko will help!”

“Maybe we should start digging a hole or something tomorrow?” Tsumugi suggests. “That way we can all rest and prepare ourselves. I’m rather tired myself after everything that has happened today...”

“Perhaps that is for the best,” Ryoma agrees tiredly. “And someone needs to tell Ouma about all of this too.”

“I’ll do that,” Rantaro offers quickly, his chair scraping across the floor loudly as he stands up. “Leave that to me.”

“Some of us should also check the warehouse for equipment,” Kaito adds. “The sooner we prepare, the better!”

“I’ll assist you with that!” Kirumi tells him. She leaves the room with Kaito, Gonta, Ryoma and Kiibo.

The room empties rather quickly after that. Kaede, however, remains seated at the table, biting her lip.

“Um, Akamatsu?”

Tsumugi carefully sits down next to her, playing with the sleeves of her blazer.

“Hey,” Kaede responds softly. “How are you feeling?”

“About killing Monokuma or about being able to leave soon?” Tsumugi asks with a nervous laugh before sighing. “I guess I’m just plain curious how things ended so well. I was so sure that something really bad was going to happen too.”

“Maybe we all just got lucky,” Kaede suggests before leaning back on her chair.

“Hey, um, Akamatsu? What did you mean before? Do you really think the game isn’t over?” Tsumugi’s eyes are wide and vulnerable.

Kaede bites the inside of her mouth before forcing out a laugh. “I think I’m just overreacting or something. I’m sure everything will be fine! I’m sorry if I scared you or anything.”

“But I kind of get where you were coming from,” Tsumugi suddenly says. “I do think that...maybe things aren’t as plain simple as we think they are. Perhaps...perhaps we should just be cautious. That’s why I suggested digging an exit tomorrow, so we have enough time to wait for Monokuma to come back if he does.”

“I don’t think Monokuma is coming back, just look at him!” Kaede points at the shattered bear. “Unless there’s a secret stash of Monokumas hiding somewhere then I think we’ll all be fine. Hopefully.”

“Yeah, maybe that is the case,” Tsumugi says with a smile. “You always know what to say, Akamatsu.”

Or maybe I just say what I want to hear. It’s just, I can’t help but think things are going to go horribly wrong tomorrow.

Exhaustion takes over Kaede’s body and she ends up face planting into her bed as soon as she enters her room. She sleeps heavily for hours. However, she is soon woken up by a strange sound coming towards her door. She lifts her head up curiously and sees that a piece of paper is being pushed into her room.

She rubs her eyes and goes to grab the paper, reading what is on it out loud.

“Meet me in the library as soon as possible. There’s something I want to show you - Rantaro. P.S. sorry for not waiting for you but I knocked and there was no answer so I presumed you were sleeping. If you’re seeing this in the morning then please talk to me as soon as possible...” Kaede raises an eyebrow.

Is this legit or a trap? I’m not sure what Rantaro’s handwriting looks like so there’s no telling if he wrote this or someone else did. Hey, hold on a second! I just have to check the map to see if he’s down there! Who said that it was the maps who said where people were? Ah, I suppose that doesn’t really matter right now. Now, let’s see...

She checks her tablet and spots that Rantaro is in fact at the library.

He won’t hurt me, right? After all, he’s been so nice to me. But still, I’m kind of scared to go down into the basement on my own. Argh, come on Kaede! Get a grip! You might miss something really important if you just wait until tomorrow!

Kaede slips on a pair of shoes and leaves her room clutching her tablet to her chest as she anxiously dashes towards the school. Everything seems a little scarier now that it's dark out. It doesn't help that she's on her own too. She enters the school and takes a deep breath before heading into the basement and uses her tablet as a makeshift torch.

The library door has been left open and Kaede creeps towards it, feeling the same nausea she had felt when she went to the library yesterday. She swallows and steps inside, hoping that she calms down sooner rather than later.

She can't help but feel a heavy sense of relief when she spots Rantaro. However, she's also surprised to see that Kokichi is talking to him. Did she miss Kokichi when she was looking at her map? Then again, it looks like he doesn't even have his tablet on him either.

The smaller male spots her first and pouts.

"Ugh, she caaame!" Kokichi complains. "She's come to bully me again, Amami! Tell her off before she can even start! My fragile heart can't take much more of her abuse!"

"Stop being so dramatic," Rantaro sighs. "I need you both to just be civil for just a couple of minutes. You can both do that, right?"

"Of course I can," Kaede says, feeling ashamed when Kokichi rolls his eyes at her.

"What I want to know is why Amami is being so secretive!" Kokichi declares as he puts his hands behind his back. "Y'know, I was super surprised when you shoved a note under my door. At first I thought you were declaring your undying love for me!"

Rantaro chuckles before shaking his head. "No, that's not it."

"Oh, I know that's not it," Kokichi says. "Because you have something you want to show us both, of course! But why us two in particular? I'm actually getting really concerned, Amami! Are you purposefully trying to raise my death flag higher? It's unfortunate people like me who die first because they end up finding out too much too soon!"

"You're not going to die," Rantaro sighs even louder. "Although I think the two of you do need to chill out and stop making yourselves stand out. After all, if you're both going to be so hellbent on defying Monokuma and the game then things are going to get a lot harder."

"Do you think we both stand out?" Kaede asks curiously before feeling a pit form in her stomach. "Does that mean I'm in danger?"

"And what do you mean I've been defying the killing game?" Kokichi complains. "I'm all for it! It's going to happen regardless of how much Akamatsu screeches about stopping it so I'm going to have as much fun as I caaan!"

"Something tells me that's a lie," Rantaro responds. "But okay, whatever you say. I guess that means I won't bother showing you what I found earlier today then."

"Well maybe I don't want to see it," Kokichi counters before sticking his tongue out. "However, Amami seems pretty serious right now and I suppose what he's found can't be that boring."

"Did you find an exit?" Kaede asks hopefully.

Rantaro shakes his head. "Not exactly. Before I show you what I found there's also something else you both need to see first."

“Oh?” Kokichi raises an eyebrow as Rantaro pulls along a ladder that is attached to the bookshelves. “What exactly do you want to show us?”

“I want you both to look at how the books have been set up on top of the shelves,” Rantaro says. “There’s something peculiar about them.”

Kokichi climbs up first since he’s closest to the ladder. Kaede can hear him let out a couple of dramatic hums before climbing back down, not saying anything as he steps to the side to let Kaede climb up.

“Both of you turn away,” Kaede demands as she starts climbing, keeping a careful eye on them both before looking at the books.

The nausea returns tenfold and for one horrifying minute, Kaede thinks she really is going to be sick when she spots how stacks of books have been lined up to make some sort of course of some sorts. It shouldn’t really scare her much. It’s just some dumb books going from a vent to a random spot. However, she can’t help but feel like something is horribly wrong.

“It looks like a trap,” Kaede whispers to herself, eyeing the vent before running her eyes along the track of books.

“It is sort of suspicious,” Rantaro agrees and Kaede almost jumps, forgetting that she’s at the top of a very tall ladder. She scrambles down quickly and wipes some cold sweat from her forehead. “And what’s more suspicious is what I found that’s near the end of the trap.”

“Oh?” Kokichi’s eyes light up. He’s clearly having too much fun with this.

“Now, before I show you both what I found, I want to make it very clear that I want to keep this between the three of us,” Rantaro says seriously. “Because believe me when I say I was very close to keeping what I found to myself. However, there’s just this feeling I keep getting about...hiding things. Like if I don’t tell anyone about this then...” He looks at the library floor with a frown. “Never mind. Just, how about I stop talking now.”

He grabs at the edge of a bookcase and Kaede is about to ask him what he’s doing before he tugs the bookcase a heavy tug. It springs open like a door, revealing a black and white door. Kaede stares at it in surprise.

“Huh?” Kaede blinks as she feels her feet move her forward. She puts a hand against the door. It’s cold and unforgiving. “Has this always been here?”

“Ooh, a secret door! Now that certainly isn’t boring!” Kokichi rubs his chin. “Buuut not knowing the code to get inside is boring! Oh, oh, I know! If this door has been used enough then the numbers should be worn sooo...and they’re not! How disappointingly boring. This is so boring that I might die from boredom!”

“Any idea on what the code might be?” Kaede asks Rantaro, who shakes his head.

“I tried a couple of times but I didn’t want to set off any alarms,” Rantaro admits. “Hey, do either of you have any ideas why there’s a secret room? It’s not on any of your maps, right?”

“Nope! How unfair!” Kokichi smiles. “But let me ask you this, Amami! How did you know this secret room?”

“I just happened to stumble upon it, that’s all,” Rantaro says before looking away.

“That’s interesting because…” Kokichi puts his hands behind his head. “...maybe Amami is trying to lure us both into the secret room and kill us! If you are planning to, I don’t know, cave our skulls in or something then can you kill Akamatsu first? I still have stuff I need to do, you know? I promise I won’t say anything!”

“Ouma…” Rantaro sighs for the third time. “You can clearly see that I’m not carrying anything dangerous on me.”

“I know,” Kokichi says. “But I am curious why you picked us both in particular to show us this very super, not so boring, secret room!”

“I’d like to know too,” Kaede says. “And how did you find this room anyway?”

“Well, it’s like Ouma said earlier,” Rantaro explains. “I was trying out some of the oldest tricks in the book. You know how libraries sometimes have those secret doors that can only be shown when you pull on a book? I just kind of thought that might be the case here.”

“And luck was certainly on your side!” Kokichi cheers. “But you know, maybe the worn carpet on the floor might’ve been a better clue that there could’ve been a secret door in here.” He points to the carpet in front of the door, which has circular marks on it. “Don’t tell me Amami didn’t even see those marks?”

“Well clearly I didn’t,” Rantaro huffs. “And if you saw those marks earlier then why didn’t you say anything?”

“A bit hypocritical, don’t you think?” Kokichi grins. “I guess I was planning on checking this area out myself but I wanted to do it alone. Who knows who this room belongs to. I mean, the black and white door suggests that maybe this room belongs to Monokuma but with how high the number pad is I don’t think that’s the case.”

“What are you saying?” Kaede asks. “That this door is designed for a person?”

“I mean, probably,” Kokichi responds. “It’s not exactly rocket science, Akamatsu.”

Rantaro clears his throat. “Anyway, the reason why I brought you both down in particular is because well, I was thinking that maybe the trap we saw is linked to this door. Not to jump to any conclusions but perhaps someone else besides us knows about this door and set up the trap to kill whoever has been using it.”

“That is if someone has been going in and out of this door in the first place,” Kokichi says. “And you’ve also got to wonder what the entire purpose of the door is anyway. I wonder, what exactly is inside of that room? And why is the door hidden?”

“Maybe...maybe Monokuma isn’t working on his own,” Kaede suggests, realisation hitting her like a rolling shot put ball. “You said Monokuma wouldn’t be able to operate this door on his own and only a person could use it. Does that mean there’s other people here besides us?”

“Potentially,” Kokichi says. “Or perhaps there’s someone here who has teamed up with Monokuma.”

“What?!” Kaede feels like her eyes are about to pop from her head. “You’re not serious, are you?”

“It could be a possibility,” Rantaro says firmly. Kaede stares at him. “And maybe someone else has figured this out too before us, hence the trap. What confuses me is that the trap seems to be out of sync with the door however. If something heavy was to drop from the shelves then it would hit

someone standing further away from the door, not in front of it.”

“Perhaps whoever has been setting up this trap hasn’t finished yet?” Kokichi suggests. “Buuut enough about the trap, you still haven’t explained why you brought Akamatsu and I down here.”

“Because.” Rantaro grits his teeth. “You’ve been defiant from the start, purposefully or not. You didn’t have to show us those whiteboards but you did and it was obvious Monokuma was caught off guard. Akamatsu...Akamatsu has been the most vocal about ending the killing game too. In other circumstances I would’ve thought confiding in her would’ve been a mistake since, well, no offence Akamatsu but I am sort of worried about you telling someone about the room by accident.”

“H-Hey!” Kaede feels her cheeks flush. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means that...” Rantaro deflates. “Either I’ve made a huge mistake or we’re all going to be one step closer to getting out of here.”

“Oh, I get it,” Kokichi says. “Amami wants to form an alliance of some sort to track down whoever has been using this room and has decided we’re both probably the best candidates!”

Earlier when Tenko said she thought Rantaro was hiding something...I wonder if this is what she meant. He’s telling both me and Kokichi quite a lot but there seems to be something off, like there’s something else he’s hiding. I know Kokichi feels the same way too just from the look on his face.

“I picked you both because...” Rantaro plays with a ring on his finger. “I didn’t know who else to turn to. Truthfully, I’m already starting to regret my decision and with Monokuma’s motive...let’s just say I might feel a lot better about telling you both if I make it through the night.”

“After all, if one of us is a traitor it’d be easy just to kill you and leave without running the risk of dying!” Kokichi cheers. “I see, I see. A very foolproof plan. But what confuses me is why you’re telling us this now that Monokuma is gone. Surely the motive is not in play anymore, right?”

“...it’s too soon to presume that,” Rantaro says softly. “But if Monokuma does come back tomorrow then...”

“It’s not possible for him to come back, Gonta completely crushed him,” Kaede says.

“Ugh, do you have to put it like that,” Kokichi says as he squirms. “You’re giving me the shivers. Yuck!”

“On the off chance that he does return then,” Rantaro continues. “Then that means there has to be a traitor. I’m not sure if the traitor is one of us or someone else but...look, just be careful.”

“You know how Monokuma knew what we were saying at all times?” Kokichi asks. “What if the traitor has been listening to us toooooo? Now they’re going to know about us and now all three of us are going to be in danger!”

“That,” Rantaro grimaces, “that won’t happen. You’re both going to be fine. I plan to stay down here all night and keep watch anyway. I was hoping that you’d both join me so if the traitor does come down...”

“They won’t be able to catch us all!” Kokichi cries gleefully. “Oh my! I had no clue Amami was such a master tactician! Maybe that’s why someone tried to kill you so early on the first time we woke up here!”

“Hey, what’s that supposed to mean?” Rantaro asks with a frown.

“Oh, you know,” Kokichi says. “I’m allowed to have my own secrets, just like how you have your own! I mean, it’s written all over your face, Amami. There’s something else you’re hiding from us, right? Akamatsu thinks so too!”

“You do?” Rantaro asks.

Kaede looks to the side as she nods. “Sorry! It’s nothing personal but something isn’t adding up here. I’ll gladly stay down here tonight if Ouma is too but…”

“Eh? You just want to use me as a meat shield!” Kokichi pouts.

“I get it,” Rantaro says. “I guess I’m expecting a lot from the both of you to just trust me out of the blue. However, if the traitor has been listening in on us then maybe it’s for the best that we stick together for the night.”

Geez, what sort of situation have I gotten myself into? My head is spinning so much right now. The secret door was surprising enough but the idea that there might be a traitor among us? I really don’t know what to do. Argh! Oh wait! Tenko! We were going to do neo aikido in the morning. If she doesn’t find me in my room then at least I know she’ll be looking for me soon. That’s some sort of a relief.

“You know, usually I don’t take orders from people below me but I have a feeling things aren’t going to be so boring soon,” Kokichi admits as he settles down on the floor, crossing his legs. “I mean, let’s hope that there’s no secret entrance somewhere else for the traitor to use! That would be super inconvenient!”

“There shouldn’t,” Rantaro says a little too confidently.

Kaede looks at him before leaning against a bookcase, hugging a leg to her chest. She positions herself so she can see both doors that lead into the library.

She falls asleep at some point. So does Rantaro. Kokichi watches them both in amusement.

Monokuma announces a new motive the very next morning.

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 1 Part 5

Chapter Notes

There's a couple of things I'd like to say!

1. Thank you all for the 100+ kudos aaaa!!!
2. Thank you all for the nice comments
3. Last chapter I received what was obviously a troll comment. I'd like to say that I do not condone those sorts of comments, including comments directed at me or at others. I've since deleted the comment but I'd like to make it very clear mean/negative comments aren't welcome here. If the wrong person receives those sorts of comments then it might put them off writing again, which is horrible. Remember to always be kind to each other!
4. Thank you for reading!

Sorry if there are any mistakes!

Have a nice day!!!

To say that people aren't happy is a massive understatement.

Kaede sits on her bed, chewing on the nail on her thumb as she thinks. The skin between her eyebrows is creased and her eyes are unfocused.

She had woken up in the library. Rantaro and Kokichi had been talking. Apparently no one used the door the entire night. Rantaro had seemed relieved and thanked them both for keeping him company and had seemed pretty satisfied that they were both safe to talk to.

Then, Monokuma arrived.

Straight away Kaede had noticed that Rantaro's face went from relaxed to sour. She had tried to talk to him, both her and Kokichi had. However, the damage had already been done. Rantaro wouldn't even talk to either of them and Kaede understands why.

He probably thinks that Kokichi and I are working together. Even though Kokichi had repeatedly said that he never saw me move and didn't enter the secret room himself, Rantaro looked like he really didn't believe him. I suppose I can't blame him. After all, he had shown both me and Kokichi the room whilst Monokuma was broken. Now Monokuma is back and I guess Rantaro thinks that Kokichi and I are to blame. But it wasn't me! I was asleep the entire night and I'm pretty sure Kokichi wouldn't have risked opening the door. Besides, how is Monokuma back anyway?

It's a tense situation. Kaede can't even think of a song that could calm her down. Then again, she's avoided thinking about playing the piano ever since the Flea Waltz situation. Even thinking about the song now makes her feel sick. She swallows and flops back onto her bed with a groan.

But for Monokuma to tell us that we've only got two days to kill someone before he kills us all. I don't have a good feeling about this. He said that the first motive is still in play, so combining that with a two day limit...I think...I think someone is going to die soon.

She taps her fingers on her legs nervously, staring up at the ceiling.

How can I save everyone? Can I save everyone? I want to save everyone. There must be a way!

Kaede springs up from her bed and storms to her door, making sure to sling her backpack over her shoulders in the process. She grips both of her bag handles tightly as she leaves her room, her face twisted into a look of determination.

What she wants to do first is take a look at the library one last time. If someone really did use the door last night then maybe they might've accidentally left it unlocked? Maybe Kaede is getting desperate but hopefully luck will be on her side. She heads down into the basement and enters the library. It's empty.

She pulls back on the bookcase carefully and the door appears. She tugs on the door and sighs. Of course it's locked. She then takes a look at the number pad, running her fingers across the buttons. Hmm. No grease or sweat. From what it feels like, the buttons haven't been used recently. Which is strange, of course. Perhaps whoever used the door wiped the buttons after they had used the pad?

However, maybe Kaede is getting a little too far ahead of herself. From what she knows, no one used the door last night. At least, no one got into the secret room using the library door. Another factor to keep in mind is that Kokichi was the one who told Kaede this. She rests her head against the black and white door. Until she finds anything to contradict him, she's going to have to believe Kokichi for now.

She feels a little stupid for falling asleep so easily last night. Despite everything, she still managed to fall asleep first. If she had managed to stay away then would things be different right now? Would Rantaro still be able to look her in the eye?

Kaede takes a step back before deciding that she should leave the library. However, when she reaches the door, she stops. Her hand grips the doorframe tightly as she bites the inside of her mouth, her blonde hair curtaining her face. She turns around and looks at the books arranged neatly on the top of the shelves and lets out a shuddery breath.

Should I...do something about the trap or not? It looks like someone is planning something but...

Her fingers hurt as her fingernails dig into the wooden doorframe.

I think...I think I'll leave it alone. Just in case...just in case things go wrong. Horribly wrong.

Kaede dashes back upstairs and for a split moment it feels like her bag has suddenly become heavier.

Truth be told, she isn't sure what to do right now. Clearly everyone has gone their separate ways, too paranoid to be around other students in case someone becomes too tempted to take up Monokuma's offer of leaving scot free. She takes another deep breath before heading upstairs. There are some rooms she would like to try and sort out, starting with the room full of weapons near Ryoma's lab.

She quickly reaches it and peers inside. Kaede can't help but shudder when she sees all the weapons on display. Crap, someone could easily just walk in here and leave both armed and dangerous. Worst of all, no one would even be able to tell. It's not like there is a list of weapons or something.

A list of weapons, huh? Maybe I should write one up. It'll probably take up the entire morning but it needs to be done. After all, if I tell everyone that I know what's in this room then maybe that

might stop them from taking something. If something does go missing I'll definitely tell everyone too.

Kaede leaves to find a pen and notebook and returns moments later, ready to spend the next couple of hours inside of the very intimidating room. She huffs and starts opening all of the metal cases one by one, checking what weapons are inside of them and writing them down slowly.

She realises after opening a couple of cases that she has no clue what half of the weapons even are or what they're called. She instead just decides to count up how many cases there are and take a note of the weapons that way instead.

"Akamatsu? What on earth are you doing?"

"Ah!" Kaede quickly places down a throwing knife. She sees Kirumi enter the room with a raised eyebrow. "I know I look pretty shady right now but I swear I haven't taken anything! Look! I'm just taking note of what weapons there are just in case someone takes one."

"Oh. I see," Kirumi responds, carefully picking up Kaede's notebook and skimming through the contents. "Akamatsu, I'm not sure how...organised this is. Isn't it better to have all the weapons noted instead of the cases? Someone could very easily enough take a weapon out of a case and then just leave the case behind."

"I know," Kaede says before drooping. "I just don't know what half of these weapons are even called! They look all weird and confusing and I'm pretty sure I'll get even more confused if I label everything as guns and knives and stuff!"

"Perhaps I could help you out then?" Kirumi suggests. "I do not want to insult the work you've done so far but I simply think that if I were to rewrite the list for you, correctly, then perhaps the list will be more useful?"

"That would be really helpful actually," Kaede admits. "But aren't you busy? I don't want to waste your time or anything."

"I think making a list of potential threats is a much higher priority than anything else at the moment. I'm frustrated that I never thought of the idea myself," Kirumi answers before frowning. "However, it is important to keep in mind that everything in the academy is potentially dangerous, Akamatsu. The warehouse has lots of things that could be used as weapons inside for example."

"And there's the room upstairs full of poison," Kaede sighs. "I know what I'm doing right now is pretty pointless but I just need something to do. If I sit around and do nothing then I'll feel useless."

"Please try not to overthink," Kirumi says as she clicks on the end of the pen. It springs to life.

"You must try not to burden yourself with such thoughts. We've all been put in a situation where we have no control. I understand that you may want to look after everyone but have you considered that may be a task that you can't accomplish?"

"A task I can't accomplish?" Kaede blinks. "What do you mean?"

"I myself try not to accept tasks that I know are impossible to accomplish," Kirumi explains as she opens up a metal case and peers inside. "Everyone has limits, Akamatsu. Such as, do you have thirteen sets of eyes? You'll need that many just to keep watch of everyone here at all times to make sure that they don't do something they'll regret."

"Of course I don't have thirteen sets of eyes!" Kaede crosses her arms. "No one does!"

“You think that I sound ridiculous, don’t you?” Kirumi says with a small smile. “However, that’s the minimum amount of sets you’ll need if you’re so determined to stop someone from killing. As you’ve very well established, no one has that many sets of eyes so don’t you think it’s a little unrealistic to presume that you’ll be able to look after everyone?”

“That’s...” Kaede grips at her elbows. “But you’re overthinking it! I’m aware that I can’t keep an eye on everyone at all times but I can still save everyone! Are you suggesting I can’t?”

“That wasn’t my intention,” Kirumi says. “However, I am simply saying that maybe you should try and set yourself smaller goals. Getting everyone out of here without knowing anything about how we got here in the first place is a little too high of an expectation. However, making sure everyone survives until lunch time is a much more reasonable expectation, is it not?”

“But that’s too...” Kaede pauses, closing her eyes before taking a deep breath. “That just makes it sound like I’m not capable of looking after everyone long term. I don’t want to be only capable of keeping everyone safe for a couple of hours, I want to keep everyone safe until we get out of here!”

“Do you know when that will be?” Kirumi asks. Kaede watches as the maid writes at an impossibly quick speed. “You’re going to overwork yourself or work yourself into a frenzy with your current mindset.”

“But I’m hardly doing anything!” Kaede argues with a huff, throwing her hands up into the air. “And I don’t want to have to rely on someone else to fix everything when I know I can!”

“I see,” Kirumi says before setting her pen down. “Then tell me, Akamatsu. What is your plan to get everyone out of here before the time limit runs out? There’s thirteen of us including yourself and no sign of an exit anywhere. There’s also a motive that someone is likely going to snatch up soon if an exit isn’t found. What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to...” Kaede furrows her brow. “Save everyone somehow. Maybe I was delusional thinking that I’d find an exit so quickly but I’m going to make sure everyone survives. I’m not sure how but first I’m going to make sure you all make it past the time limit.”

“You’re going to make sure we all make it past the time limit?” Kirumi blinks. “Akamatsu, maybe I’m jumping to conclusions but you didn’t include yourself when you said that. You’re not planning to do something stupid are you?”

“Huh? Of course not!” Kaede’s eyes go wide. “But I’ve got to do something! I’ll stop Monokuma with my own hands if I have to! Shirogane proved yesterday that Monokuma can be broken if he gets overheated so maybe we can try and overheat him again when the time limit gets close.”

“Don’t you realise how dangerous that would be?” Kirumi asks. “Perhaps you-”

“I have to do something!” Kaede heaves in a breath before shaking her head. “I’m sorry but...but can you just stop lecturing me? I’m trying my best, okay? I know I haven’t thought things through properly and I know I’m silly for thinking everything is going to be okay but what else am I supposed to think?”

Kirumi’s face turns soft as she clasps her hands down by her waist. “My apologies, Akamatsu. It seems I have upset you even though that wasn’t my intention. I simply just want to prepare you for what’s to come.”

“I know,” Kaede says. “It’s just, I hate feeling so useless. Every time I try to help I just make things

worse and I clearly don't know what I'm doing. Ever since I woke up here it just feels like everything is going wrong! I feel like I could be doing more or at the very least could be helping someone out, you know? I know I'm not the sharpest tool in the shed but..."

"You want to be helpful," Kirumi finishes. "Akamatsu, you're doing as much as you can at the moment to help everyone. You've made it very clear that you're not going to hurt anyone and that's more than enough. However, please make sure you don't end up being vulnerable yourself. Someone might take advantage of your refusal to participate in the killing game."

"But no one is going to..." Kaede feels her energy start to drain away. "Okay, so maybe someone is going to kill. How are you so calm, Tojo? Aren't you scared?"

"I trust myself enough to be able to recognise if someone is acting shifty," Kirumi admits. "But even I have accepted that there's not much I can do in a situation like this. The most I can do is make sure everyone is comfortable during the next two days."

"But what if no one is dead before the time limit?" Kaede asks. "Aren't you scared of dying?"

"I think I'll be more satisfied that I died without hurting anyone," Kirumi answers with a sad smile. "Of course I don't want to die but if I had to pick between surviving and killing someone or dying without hurting anyone then I know my answer."

"That's very noble of you..." Kaede murmurs. She looks around the room and deflates. "But...you know that conversation that happened during lunch yesterday? About how some sacrifices might have to be made?"

"That is an option," Kirumi says before grimacing. "However, that is also an option I'd personally like to avoid. We're all equal here, after all. No one's life here is worth more than someone else's. Such as, I know Hoshi offered himself up yesterday but he shouldn't have to die so we can all live."

"That's true," Kaede responds before clenching her fists. "I'm sorry, I think I must be feeling overwhelmed. Of course I would never ask someone to die!"

"Perhaps you should take a break?" Kirumi suggests. "After all, I'm fairly certain I'll get this room done quickly. I'll find you once I've finished and give you a copy of the list. Perhaps I should also leave a copy of the list on the door too, that way people may be less inclined to take someone if they know the weapons are being counted."

"Yeah, that's a good idea," Kaede agrees. "And yeah, I'd also appreciate it if you made me a list too."

Kirumi nods before tearing off a couple of sheets of paper. "I know you must be wanting to do something so maybe you could take note of what poisons there are upstairs? It shouldn't be too much work so you can relax whilst writing down another list. All the poisons also have names so it'll be a lot easier too."

"Ah, that sounds like a good idea," Kaede says with a smile, taking the paper gratefully. "Thanks, Tojo! But, ah, will you be okay on your own?"

"I'll be fine," Kirumi answers. "I'll make sure to check up on you before making lunch."

Kaede leaves the room, feeling the corners of her lips wobble as she heads upstairs. She will not cry. She will not cry. She will not cry.

C'mon, Kaede. Get a grip! You're doing everything you can to help everyone here and you can trust Kirumi to make the list properly. Besides, it's really important to count up all the weapons and poisons now before some actually go missing!

She heads up to the top floor and goes to the room with the fireplace and poisons. However, what surprises her the most is that Miu is already in the room, rummaging through all the bottles.

“What are you doing?!” Kaede yells and Miu shrieks, almost dropping a purple bottle onto the floor. She luckily manages to catch it before any damage is done.

“What the fuck, Bakamatsu?!” Miu angrily retorts as she slams the bottle back down into the cabinet. “Are you trying to give me a heart attack?!”

“What were you doing with that bottle?!” Kaede asks as she jabs a finger towards the inventor. “That’s poison, you know?!”

“I know what poison is you fucking moron,” Miu huffs, rolling her eyes. “All the bottles are labelled, see!”

Kaede puts a hand to her head. “I know that! But why are you here?”

“Well, uh...” Miu sweats as she twists a strand of hair around her finger. “I know I look super fucking suspicious right now but it’s not what you think! I-I wasn’t doing anything bad...”

“You were going through all the poison!” Kaede argues. “You haven’t taken anything, have you?”

“Of course not you dumb bitch,” Miu responds angrily. “Besides, why are you here? Planning on killing us all? I fucking knew it you sly asshole. Ouma was right to say you’re dangerous! You’re trying to fucking kill us all with your shitty tits!”

“I’m not dangerous and I’m not going to kill anyone!” Kaede sighs. “I’ve actually come up here to take note of what poisons there are and make a list so I’ll know if anything goes missing. Tojo is doing the same downstairs with all the weapons in that one room.”

“Hah?” Miu puts a hand on her hip. “Like that’s going to help. Seriously, your brain must be as non-existent as your standards. Everything in this school could be used as a weapon you brainless twat. How the hell is listing everything going to-”

“I just want something to do, okay!” Kaede snaps. “So can you just shut up for a second and tell me why you’re in this room yourself!”

“Hee!” Miu shrinks in on herself. “W-Why are you glaring at me like that? I-I’m not fucking dangerous, you are! I-I bet you’re only in here to take all the poison for yourself and kill us all!”

“That’s not true!” Kaede shouts. “I’ve already said why I’m here! You’re only making yourself look suspicious by now answering my question, you know! What are you up to, Iruma?”

“I-I was just looking for something to get me high, okay?!” Miu wails as she hugs herself. “There was fuck all in the warehouse and when I heard there was some suspicious chemicals upstairs I thought...”

Kaede lets out a heavy sigh. “You seriously thought that there could be drugs up here?”

“I-I mean...” Miu whimpers before standing up straight. “There’s no way I want to be fucking sober right now! I want to be tripping some serious balls off for the next two days! It’s already bad

enough that someone is probably going to kill soon but to have Monokuma tell us we've only got two days to live? Fuck that! Why the hell should I just sit around and wait to die when I can get fucking high?!"

"Iruma, you do realise that poison is really dangerous right?" Kaede shakes her head. "I seriously can't believe you thought there might be drugs up here..."

"And if there were any drugs then I wouldn't share with the likes of you," Miu says with a sniff. She hugs her chest tightly. "Pathetic Akamatsu and her pathetic udders. Just fuck off and leave me alone. You're making me nervous just standing there gawping at me. I know you're jealous of my body but it's fucking creepy."

"I'm not going to leave you alone in a room full of poison," Kaede says softly. "Iruma, can you just forget about being high? What if something happens to you and you're too out of it to protect yourself?"

"I'll get high in my room, not out in public you fucking idiot," Miu hisses. "And since you're the only person who knows this then everyone will know you'll be the killer if I end up dead! So fuck off already and find something to occupy yourself with. The longer you take, the better."

"Iruma..." Kaede sighs as she takes a step forward. She notices how Miu's arms curl around her chest a little more tighter, sweat dripping down her face. "I'm not going to hurt you..."

"Just, don't fucking touch me or whatever," Miu grumbles. "You're already shady enough as it is."

"Can you just let me get to the cabinet?" Kaede asks. "Seriously, I want to count everything inside before something is taken. You haven't taken anything, have you?"

"Haaah? Are you fucking accusing me of something?" Miu barks back with a growl. "Well fuck you, Akamatsu. I thought you got off on trying to be friends with everyone, not pointing fingers at the first person you see!"

"That's not what I'm trying to say!" Kaede cries before crossing her arms. "Just, ah, calm down! You're taking things too far! I haven't accused you of anything, Iruma. I don't even have a reason to either! You clearly haven't taken anything so..."

Miu huffs as she throws her hair over her shoulder. "That's fucking right. I haven't done shit, Bakamatsu, unlike you. I'm not the one who ended up on that shitty dangerous person list anyway."

"That's..." Kaede winces. "I don't know why I ended up on that list..."

"Because you're a fucking nut case," Miu tells her. "You're so desperate for us all to get along that I bet you'll end up killing someone if they decide to step out of line."

"That's not true!" Kaede argues. "Iruma, what do you have against me?! Why the hell are you being so mean to me anyway?"

"Don't shout at me!" Miu wails. "I haven't done anything!"

Kaede sighs. Why is it so hard to have a simple conversation with Miu? "I'll stop shouting if you stop shouting, deal?"

"Fine, what the fuck ever," Miu says as she rolls her eyes. "Do whatever the hell you want with the cabinet but I ain't leaving just in case you do find any good stuff because that shit belongs to me. I

was here first!”

“If I do find any...drugs then you’re welcome to them,” Kaede responds with a sigh. “Can you just let me get to the cabinet. Please?”

“P-Please?” Miu whimpers. “R-Resorting to begging now, are we?”

“Quit making things awkward!”

Kaede pushes past Miu and starts to grab bottles from the shelf one by one, placing them down on a nearby table. She notices that all the bottles look different from each other. Some are thick and some are thin. All of them are also different colours too. Kaede huffs as she places the last couple of bottles down onto the table.

She can’t help but think that some of the bottles are rather aesthetically pleasing. If they weren’t full of deadly poison then she would think that the bottles almost looked rather cool. She sighs as she starts to push the bottles around, sorting them out one by one, splitting the poisons from the antidotes.

“So what? You’re just going to make a big fucking list?” Miu asks curiously as she leans against the table.

“Yep!” Kaede answers, trying her best not to sound too impatient. “It’s to deter people from taking any of the poison.”

“Hah? How did you figure that out?” Miu responds. “What’s the list going to do? Snitch?”

“I’ll do a check of the list every so often,” Kaede tells her as she pairs a poison and an antidote together. She wants to make sure that each poison has an antidote. “If I notice that something is missing or a bottle has been tampered with then I’ll know someone is up to something.”

“I mean...” Miu huffs. “I guess that’s a pretty good fucking idea.”

“What? Do you think it’ll actually work?” Kaede asks curiously, feeling a little better about herself.

“Who knows,” Miu responds. “As long as the list doesn’t get destroyed then yeah, I guess you’ve got a pretty solid plan.”

Didn’t she just say before my idea was stupid? Honestly, Miu is so weird. Although I guess I did spook her when I first came into the room so she was probably trying to be mean to get me to leave. At least she actually thinks the lists are a decent idea.

Kaede hums as she matches the final two bottles together. It’s slightly irritating how the bottles for each poison and antidote don’t match visually. Then again, that’s the least of Kaede’s worries. She starts to write down each poison and antidote one by one, double checking that each poison has its own cure.

“Why are there antidotes anyway?” Miu asks. “I mean, what’s the point in poisoning someone if you’re going to save them afterwards.”

“I really don’t know, Iruma,” Kaede admits with a sigh.

“It’s probably for some weird fuck who has a poison kink or something,” Miu mutters under her breath as she picks up a bottle. It’s small and pink. “Takes thirty minutes to kick in. Tasteless and

odourless, a poison for beginners...”

“Yeah, the labels are rather taunting,” Kaede says as she continues to write. “Iruma, can you put that one down? I haven’t added it to the list yet.”

“Yeah, yeah...” Miu rolls her eyes as she places the poison down before picking up the antidote for it. “Haaah? Why is this one in a blue bottle? Talk about unsatisfying...”

“Seriously, I don’t know!” Kaede snaps, causing Miu to jump. “Iruma, can’t you see I’m busy? If you’re that desperate to know then ask Monokuma!”

“Ask Monokuma what?”

“Fuck!” Miu jumps.

Kaede sighs as she hears a smashing noise and spots the broken bottle on the floor, antidote leaking through the wooden floor boards. “Iruma!”

“Hee! I didn’t mean to!” Miu trembles. “It’s that dumb fucking bear’s fault! He scared me!”

“Who are you calling a dumb bear?” Monokuma snarls. “And look at the mess you’ve made!”

“I-It was an accident! I swear!” Miu promises before pointing a finger at Kaede. “It’s her fault that all the bottles are out anyway! Blame her!”

“Seriously?!” Kaede huffs. “You’re the one who dropped it!”

“Now, now, let’s not fight,” Monokuma says. “Unless, of course, perhaps one of you is going to kill the other?”

“Of course not!” Kaede frowns. “Can you just leave already?”

“But someone wanted to ask me a question! I heard so with my belly button microphone!” Monokuma responds.

Miu pulls a face. “S-Seriously? That’s fucking gross!”

“I swear I heard someone ask why the bottles weren’t matching,” Monokuma mumbles.

“Yeah, I asked,” Miu tells him. “It’s fucking unsatisfying!”

“Is it really that big of a deal?” Monokuma says. “Honestly, of all the things to complain about, it’s the bottles?”

“It’s not just the bottles! It’s what’s inside of them!” Miu complains. “Why’s there no good stuff here? Are you holding out on us, huh?!”

“Why have drugs when you can kill someone instead?” Monokuma asks. “That’s the only high you ever need to experience, trust me my dear.”

Kaede rolls her eyes, knocking shards of glass out of the way with her foot as she moves along the table to grab more bottles. Her list is almost complete. “Can you leave now? You said it yourself, Iruma’s question wasn’t even important.”

“I’m actually curious about what you’re doing,” Monokuma admits bashfully. “Are you planning to hoard all of this poison, Akamatsu?”

“No!” Kaede glares at the bear. “I’m taking note of what...it doesn’t matter. Why should I tell you anyway?”

“You’re making a list?” Monokuma pauses before snorting. “Isn’t that rather counter productive? You’re wasting your time! You could be planning a murder instead, not trying to keep everyone safe! Sheesh, what a waste of time.”

“It’s not a waste of time,” Kaede growls. “Get out!”

“Fine, fine!” Monokuma holds his paws up. “At least let me clean up this mess first. I’d have my kids do this sort of thing but I can’t find them. How tragic, now I’m going to have to get my paws dirty.”

Kaede sighs as she watches Monokuma pick up the shards of glass. She decides to ignore him as she starts to get to the bottom of her list. “Maybe I should just pour all the poison down the sink or something...”

“No, no, no!” Monokuma’s eyes shine red. “Firstly that’s a waste! Secondly, I restock this cabinet as and when needed. When both a poison and it’s antidote have been used I restock them. Aren’t I so generous?”

Kaede rolls her eyes. “Extremely.”

“I knew you loved me!” Monokuma sighs dreamily before waving. “Well, if that’s anything then I have places to be, people to torment. You know, the usual. Ah, it’s so hard being me sometimes.”

Kaede tries to not let her eyes roll out of her head as Monokuma finally leaves. Seriously, what an annoying bear.

And distracting too. Honestly, I’ve lost count of where I was now. Oh well, as long as I can match a poison to an antidote then I’ll be fine.

“So there’s no fucking drugs anywhere?” Miu sniffs. If she becomes any sadder Kaede could imagine mushrooms growing from her. “For fucks sake, what am I supposed to do now?”

“Find something else to do?” Kaede suggests sarcastically. “Why are you so desperate to find some drugs anyway?”

“Because!” Miu pouts. “They calm me down and shit. Like you’d understand, Bakamatsu. G-Go back to making your shitty list.”

“I’m almost done with it anyway,” Kaede says. “Besides, I’ll need to write down a few extra copies anyway for safe keeping.”

“You do that then,” Miu responds. “But if there’s no good stuff here then I’m fucking out of here. There’s no point staying here with you anyway. The longer I stay around someone with a lack of tits my brain starts to suffer. I’ve probably lost a million brain cells listening to you talk already.”

One minute she’s okay to talk to and the next she’s back to insulting me. Honestly, what’s wrong with her? Is this all over her not being able to find any drugs? She needs to grow up. I couldn’t care less that she claims she needs them to calm down.

Kaede watches as Miu leaves the room with a huff, the inventor hugging her chest tightly.

She reads over her list with a satisfied hum and starts to put the bottles back. She decides against

putting the bottles back in pairs but does make sure to shove the bottles full of poison at the back of the cabinets so they're harder to reach.

Let me just check over my list one more time...hmm. Yep! It seems okay! Every poison has an antidote! Perfect! I'll quickly copy the list a couple of times. I should probably pin one on the door and give a copy to Kirumi. I'll keep one for myself, of course.

Finally feeling more useful, Kaede smiles as she starts to write down a second list, listening as the fireplace crackles peacefully.

Kaede and Kirumi swap lists during lunch. Not many people turn up, including both Rantaro and Kokichi. She decides to instead sit down next to Tsumugi, who seems happy that Kaede finally has some free time.

They leave the dining room together after finishing their lunch.

"So...Monokuma's motive," Kaede says.

"By any chance do you have some sort of plan?" Tsumugi asks before her eyes go wide. "Ah! I'm not trying to pressure you or anything but you sort of seem like the person who always tries to think ahead."

Kaede smiles weakly. "Sorry, Shirogane. I haven't thought of anything just yet. Tojo and I spent the morning making lists of all the weapons and poisons upstairs however."

"Oh really?" Tsumugi asks, clearly interested. "Oh! I get it! You made lists so you can keep track of everything! That way if something goes missing you'll be able to...ah, I'm just explaining an idea you came up with, aren't I?"

"No, I'm glad you understand why I made lists," Kaede says. "But in the long run I'm not sure how useful they're going to be. After all, everything here could be considered a weapon."

"But you're making everyone aware of the most obvious ones," Tsumugi tells her. "Which is a good thing! It's not like anyone else is trying to be helpful."

"I suppose so..."

"Oh, by the way!" Tsumugi tilts her head to the side. "Where were you this morning? I stopped by your room this morning to see if you wanted to eat breakfast with me but I never got an answer. Were you sleeping in someone else's room?"

"I, ah..." Kaede opens and closes her mouth before smiling. "Yeah, I was sharing a room with someone else. I guess I was feeling stressed out and scared so..."

"Who did you share with? Was it a boy? A girl?" Tsumugi asks almost a little too excitedly. "Did you share a bed? Oh, oh? Did you do anything else other than sleeping?!"

"I..." Kaede pulls a face. "I didn't do anything like that! I think you've gotten the wrong end of the stick, Shirogane! I just, you know, slept on the couch in someone else's room. That's all there is to it."

"Ah, I see!" Tsumugi laughs awkwardly. "Sorry about that. I guess I'm a sucker for romance, you know? Oh, oh! What sort of romances do you like? I know it's horribly cliché but I've always been

a sucker for the romance plot where the hero helps out a friend who thinks they're a bad person but they're actually not. I guess what would be super tragic is if one of them dies too--"

"Shirogane, that's interesting and all but now really isn't the time," Kaede says.

"Oh, you're right," Tsumugi says. "Let me guess, you want to keep looking for an exit?"

"I..." Kaede pauses before shaking her head. "No, I think I'm done with trying to find an exit. At least for now anyway."

"Oh!" Tsumugi blinks. "Then what are you planning on doing?"

"I was thinking of going to the warehouse and checking what's inside," Kaede tells her. "I think out of all the places here, the warehouse might have the most stuff inside that could be used as a weapon."

"I see!" Tsumugi frowns. "You weren't thinking of making a list of everything inside, were you? The warehouse is huge! It'd take longer than two days to actually do that, you know?"

"Maybe there's a way to block the door off?" Kaede suggests. Luckily, the warehouse is nearby. The two step inside and Kaede is hit with a feeling of nausea momentarily. "Ah...it really is big inside."

"Akamatsu? Are you okay? You suddenly went really pale," Tsumugi says before putting a hand to the pianist's forehead. "And you're really warm too."

"I'm fine," Kaede insists as she ignores the voice inside of her head to tell her to turn around and leave. She passes a crate full of shot put balls and puts her hands on her hips. "I see where you're coming from. It really would be impossible noting down what's in here. However, I don't think there's a way to block the door without trapping us both inside the room."

"Akamatsu, I get you're trying to be extra cautious but have you considered that you maybe can't fix everything?" Tsumugi asks nervously.

"I know I can't fix everything," Kaede tells her before sighing. "But I can fix problems one at a time, right? What I want to try and do is just keep people safe. People are going to start getting desperate soon and I rather hide all of the obvious weapons out of sight."

"Hmm..." Tsumugi puts a hand to her chin. "Oh! I know! How about we just break the door handle so no one can use it?"

"But that'll be breaking the rules," Kaede points out with a weak smile. "It'd be a lot more convenient if we could but..."

"But let's say that the handle was to break by accident?" Tsumugi suggests before lowering her voice. "There's no rules about accidentally breaking the handle now, is there?"

"That is true but you do realise Monokuma can hear everything we're saying?" Kaede tells her. "If the door handle ends up suspiciously broken now then he's going to know that we did something."

"I suppose so..." Tsumugi sighs in disappointment. "Oh! How about we ask Iruma to make us a lock then? She claims she's the best inventor in the world, right? I'm sure if we ask her then she'll make us something!"

"Ask Iruma to make us something?" Kaede laughs. "I'm not sure if she actually would. She's a

little intimidating and after our conversation today, I, well, I don't think she likes me that much."

"Nonsense!" Tsumugi pumps her fists. "If we tell her that she'll be doing us all a service then I'm sure she'll agree to help us! Maybe we should give her some sort of ego boost to encourage her too!"

"...do you really think she would agree to help us?" Kaede muses. "Because if she really could make us a lock for this door then that would be a really big help."

"How about we go and ask her now?" Tsumugi suggests. "The sooner the better, right? Oh! I suppose we'll have to give her something to make the lock with though, huh? How about I explore near the back! You wait there, I'll only be a second!"

Tsumugi dashes to the back of the warehouse and Kaede loses sight of her easily. It's impressive how such a spacious room exists inside of the school. Kaede's school certainly never had a room this big and full of random items.

Kaede fiddles with the straps on her bag as she leans back against some gym mats and sighs, waiting for Tsumugi to return. She's lucky that Tsumugi is smart enough to think of good plans. She's also lucky that Tsumugi is brave enough to ask Miu for help too. It's not as if Kaede is scared of Miu but she is wary of her.

With Tsumugi by my side I think everything is going to be okay.

The pianist smiles to herself.

Even though I know what I'm doing is only delaying the inevitable I feel better knowing I'm actually trying to help everyone. However, is what I'm doing enough? If there's a traitor among us, some sort of mastermind, then they're going to do everything they can to stop me or at least ruin all of my plans. What am I saying? Of course there's a traitor in this school. Monokuma coming back is the only proof I need.

She takes a deep breath.

I'm not the only person who thinks there's some sort of mastermind either. I'm pretty sure Kokichi and Rantaro think that there's one and clearly someone else does too because of the trap in the library. I wonder what the plan is anyway for that trap? It looks like someone wants to roll something along the bookshelves and drop something on someone's head. It also looks like the books go towards the hidden door too. Is it that...someone is trying to get rid of the traitor?

Kaede bites her lip and looks around the room.

Someone must be carrying such a heavy burden. Thinking about...killing someone can't be easy. I know that murder is bad but...I suppose I get why someone would try to target the traitor. The traitor clearly has the means of creating new Monokumas if he gets destroyed so if the traitor is removed from the equation and we manage to get rid of Monokuma for good then...then there will be no one around to run the game.

She picks up a shot put ball and rolls it around in her hands. It's heavy.

There's someone out there who is too scared to ask for help. They've realised a scary truth and they don't know who to turn to. It's obvious that they've come up with a plan to get us all out of here but is killing the traitor really the right answer? Does someone have the strength to do such a thing? Should I even...should I even let this person carry out their plan?

“I found everything!”

Tsumugi returns from the back of the warehouse with a wave. She has a small box under an arm full of random materials she must’ve found.

“Ah! Did you find everything you needed?” Kaede asks as she puts a hand behind her back.

“Yep!” Tsumugi is beaming. “Shall we get going? I think we both have everything we need from here, after all!”

“Y-Yeah, that’s right. I just hope that what you found is enough,” Kaede says.

“I wouldn’t worry too much,” Tsumugi responds. “Come on, the sooner we find her then the sooner we’ll have a lock!”

Tsumugi happily heads to the door and Kaede looks at the cosplayer’s back guiltily as she places what she needs into her bag and follows after her.

“Of course I can make a fucking lock!”

Tsumugi and Kaede find Miu in her room. The pink inventor looks at them both with a huff.

“But why should I waste my time when I’ve got much more important things to do right now?!” Miu snaps. “I get Bakamatsu is hell bent on putting fucking child locks on everything but we’ve been here for like what, a day or two now? Plenty of people could have been in the warehouse and taken something already.”

“She’s just trying to help!” Tsumugi counters as her face falls. “I thought you could make anything! Or is making a lock too hard for you?”

“Haaah? I just said I could make one!” Miu growls. She looks like she’s seconds away from slamming the door closed. “Who the fuck do you think you are you four eyed freak?! I just think trying to lock every door here is a waste of time. Besides, I’m busy so-”

“But everyone will be so grateful if you help them!” Kaede pleads as she nudges Tsumugi to the side. “Iruma, please! Everyone is desperate! It’ll only take a couple of minutes so-”

“A couple of minutes my ass! Do you think I’m God? Even I know making something as complex as a lock in under a day will be harder than a virgin seeing his first pair of tits!” Miu rolls her eyes. “Well, it’ll be hard for a basic bitch, which I’m not! But it’ll be a waste of my time so how about you both take a hint and fuck off!”

“B-But...” Tsumugi clears her throat. “Why don’t you want to help everyone?! You’ll be keeping yourself safe by doing this, you know?”

“I can keep myself safe perfectly fine thank you very much,” Miu says with a sniff. “Now piss off!”

She goes to slam the door shut but Kaede dives forwards, wedging her foot between the door and the doorframe. She winces and hears Tsumugi gasp beside her.

“A-Akamatsu! Are you okay?!” Tsumugi frantically looks at Kaede’s foot and then at the box in her hands, clearly unsure on what to do.

“For fucks sake, Bakamatsu,” Miu growls. “Move!”

“No! I won’t!” Kaede shouts before taking a deep breath. She drops to her knees. She hears Miu whimper at the same time Tsumugi lets out an even louder gasp than before. “Please, Iruma, I’m begging you. You’re the only person I can turn to right now and I’m desperate.”

“H-Hee! What d-do you think you’re doing?!” Miu squeals, her eyes turning watery. “Y-You’re embarrassing yourself.”

“I don’t care! I’ll do anything to keep everyone safe!” Kaede argues, curling her hands into fists. “You don’t have to do this just for me! Think about everyone else! Just, please, Iruma! Please help!”

“I-I’m begging you too!”

“Shirogane?!” Kaede’s mouth goes wide as the cosplayer kneels down next to her.

“W-What sort of freaky mind fuckery are you both into!?” Miu presses herself against her door frame. “S-Seriously!”

Tsumugi slams her hands onto the floor. “I’m begging you, Iruma! We both promise that we’ll leave you alone after this! All we want is one lock and we’ll be out of your way, we promise!”

“All of this over a stupid lock...” Miu whimpers. “F-Fine! I’ll make you both one. J-Just get off the floor before someone gets the wrong idea!”

“You promise?” Kaede’s eyes go wide. “Thank you so much, Iruma! Seriously!”

“I’m only doing this so you both leave me alone,” Miu mutters before eyeing the contents inside of Tsumugi’s box. “I suppose some of that stuff will help...I can’t promise I’ll have something finished by today. Fuck, this is such a waste of time...whatever! I’ll give your shitty lock to you tomorrow, Bakamatsu. But I’ll find you! I don’t need you snooping around my shit.”

“I can’t believe you agreed so easily!” Tsumugi admits before smiling. “But this is definitely the best case scenario!”

“Can you both chill out?” Miu sighs. “And fuck off before I change my mind. I’m gonna have to pull an all nighter to sort this shit out.”

Kaede and Tsumugi leave before the inventor can change her mind.

Kaede returns to the library after the night time announcement is made.

There’s someone she wants to talk to and she knows that they’ll be there, probably trying to open up the secret door.

She quietly watches as Rantaro sighs to himself before pressing down random numbers on the number pad impatiently. Kaede winces as the number pad lets out a loud beep, indicating that the numbers are wrong.

“You know it’s rude to stare, right?”

Kaede jumps as Rantaro gives her a lazy look. She lowers her head down in shame. “Ah, sorry! I just...didn’t want to disturb you.”

“But you must’ve come down here for a reason, right?” Rantaro counters as he crosses his arms. “Unless you’re just waiting for me to leave?”

“No that’s wrong,” Kaede says. “I’ve come down here to talk to you actually. Look, about yesterday-”

“It’s pretty suspicious that I told both you and Ouma about this room after Monokuma was destroyed,” Rantaro says. “And then the very next day Monokuma is magically back. Tell me, is there some sort of machine inside that can fix him or something?”

“I-I don’t know, I haven’t been inside,” Kaede tells him. “Why don’t you believe me?”

“It’s just a little coincidental that Monokuma returns only after I showed you the door,” Rantaro says.

“It was my first time seeing it last night,” Kaede huffs. “Can you stop being so paranoid for a second and just think about how impossible it is for me to be working with Monokuma! Ouma said it himself that he kept an eye on us both all night since we both fell asleep! Is that not enough proof for you?”

“I don’t know!” Rantaro snaps. “But-”

“I don’t want to hear another excuse!” Kaede argues. She feels a headache start to grow. “You’re being unfair. I haven’t accused *you* of being a traitor because I trust you! Why can’t you do the same?”

“Because trusting people here is the same as deciding whether you want to live or die,” Rantaro answers slowly. “I decided to trust both you and Ouma last night and look what happened.”

“So why haven’t you exposed me or Ouma yet?” Kaede counters. “Because if you’re so convinced that the two of us are so dangerous then why haven’t you told the group yet about your suspicions? Or are you just that paranoid?”

“I have plenty of reasons to be...extra careful,” Rantaro tells her with a low voice. His hand trembles around his tablet. “Call me whatever you want, just not paranoid. In a situation like this I have every right to be on edge, don’t you think? From the look on your face you must feel the same way too.”

“But I’d rather trust people than doubt them,” Kaede says. “You must’ve felt the same way when you told me to come down here last night. What changed your mind?”

“Monokuma,” Rantaro instantly answers before scowling. “Listen, if you’ve come down here to tell me off then can you just go? The sooner I get this door open then the sooner I can expose who the mastermind is-”

“What? Do you think they’re inside waiting for you?” Kaede snaps. “If there is a mastermind or a traitor or whatever they’ve probably got more important stuff to do right now than to taunt you.”

“We won’t know what they’re doing until I get this stupid door open,” Rantaro says. “So if you don’t mind, I’d like some privacy. I’m not going to get anything done with you breathing down my neck all the time.”

Kaede scowls. “When did you turn into such a horrible person? I only came down here to see if you were okay!”

Rantaro sighs loudly. Kaede can see him tense up before he deflates. "...sorry. It's just...please leave me alone. If you want to prove to me that you're on my side then you'll leave me alone. Involving you and Ouma in all this was unfair."

"No, no it wasn't," Kaede says as she puts a hand to her chest. "You trusted us both and that's good! Everyone here is a team, remember? I'm going to rely on you whilst we're here and I expect you to rely on me. I'm sorry for calling you paranoid but I can tell you're scared. Don't worry, I am too."

"Then why are you so good at hiding it?" Rantaro asks with a helpless laugh. He runs a hand through his hair. "God, Akamatsu, you certainly don't know when to stop, do you?"

Kaede shakes her head. "Ever since I woke up here all I wanted to do was to find a way out. I'm not sure if I'm going to find an exit for everyone but I do know I want to keep everyone safe. I'm not sure how far I'll go in order to do that but...please try not to worry too much from now on. Tomorrow is going to be hard for us all but I think that maybe..."

"Do you have a plan?" Rantaro asks.

"...yeah, sort of," Kaede admits. "But it's a one person plan. Sorry if I sound like a hypocrite right now but..."

"I think I get where you're coming from," Rantaro says softly before leaning against the bookshelves. "Listen, I'm sorry for getting snappy at you earlier. It's just, I'm not like you. I can't trust people so easily. I have never been able to."

"But you can try, right?" Kaede asks. "You can try to trust people more. That's all I'm asking of you."

"...perhaps one day I could try," Rantaro promises. "But right now I just, y'know, need time to myself. As long as tomorrow goes well I think..."

"We should totally be friends once we get out of here," Kaede says as she pumps a fist.

"Oh, we aren't friends already?" Rantaro teases.

Kaede sticks her tongue out. "That's not what I meant and you know it!"

"Yup, you got me," Rantaro says. "But, ah, you should head to bed soon. I'm not sure how long I'll be down here for."

"But will you be okay on your own?" Kaede asks. "I don't like the thought of someone being able to creep up on you, that's all."

"I'll be fine," Rantaro reassures her. "After all, I've checked out the library and have a clear view of both doors. Oh! And I also won't have to worry about anything dropping on my head anymore. You know those books from earlier? I moved them around so if anything were to roll from the vent then nothing bad is gonna happen."

"O-Oh?" Kaede blinks and her shoulders suddenly feel like someone has placed the entire world onto them. "I see. That's...that's good. W-We should've done that earlier, huh?"

"To be honest it looked like someone was trying to set up a murder," Rantaro says quietly. "But there's no need to resort to anything drastic like that, you know? I don't want anyone to have to stoop down to Monokuma's level to get out of here."

“Y-Yeah, no one should have to kill to leave,” Kaede agrees quickly. She pulls on her bag straps. “But, um, Amami? What about the traitor or whatever they’re called? Don’t you think that maybe...”

“They don’t deserve to die either,” Rantaro tells her. “I’d rather that they were captured than killed. Besides, if they’re working with Monokuma then they want a murder to happen. What’s more satisfying than foiling their plans by having them captured instead of killed?”

I see where he’s coming from but what if they escape if they’re captured? Then the killing game is just going to get started up again and again and again until they get what they want. I can’t save everyone if there’s someone in the way of me ending this killing game!

“Why don’t you go to bed, Akamatsu? You look pale,” Rantaro says. “And hey, try not to worry too much. I’ll have this door open soon!”

Kaede nods and turns around, feeling her legs wobble as they carry her out of the library.

She does aikido with Tenko before deciding to have some breakfast.

There’s just a little under a day before Monokuma...

“Oi, Bakamatsu!”

Kaede spots Miu stomp from the building near the garage. She can’t help but notice that the inventor looks exhausted. Miu has bags under her eyes and it’s obvious that she’s been running her hand through her hair for several hours now.

“Are you okay, Iruma?” Kaede asks. “Oh! About the lock-”

“I gave Shittygane the stupid lock,” Miu tells her before putting a hand on her hip. “What the fuck is wrong with her this morning? She was practically bawling her eyes out when she asked for the lock, you know? Crying about her shitty manga or books or something?”

“I didn’t know Shirogane collected manga,” Kaede admits before shaking her head. “But she’s okay now, right?”

“Why would I know?” Miu rolls her eyes before glancing up at the glass walls. “She wouldn’t stop wailing about how we’re all going to die soon. I mean, what the fuck does she want me to do about it? She should stop being so selfish, it’s not like she’s the only person shitting herself over the time limit.”

“She’s just scared,” Kaede says. “Cut her some slack...”

“She doesn’t have to be a big fucking cry baby about it though,” Miu says before letting out a loud groan. “I’m so fucking sick of it here! The sooner I get out of here, the better.”

“We’ll be out of here soon hopefully,” Kaede reassures her. “I’ll make sure of it.”

Miu scoffs. “Yeah? And what are you going to do? Bore Monokuma to death with your piano?”

“No!” Kaede sighs. “Look, just forget it. Just keep safe, okay? If you think you’re in danger then you can find me. I’ll keep you safe!”

“Why?” Miu asks, raising an eyebrow. “You don’t fucking know me. Why bother keeping me

safe?"

"Because it's the right thing to do," Kaede says before grabbing the straps of her bag. "And it's what I want too. You might not like me, Iruma, and quite frankly I don't care about that. The only thing I care about is keeping you all safe and beating Monokuma at his own shitty game."

Miu opens and closes her mouth before huffing. "You're so fucking weird, Bakamatsu. And naïve. You're an idiot if you think everything thinks just like you, you know? There's no point making friends here since someone is going to end up stabbing you in the back."

"Then I'm just going to hope that no one does," Kaede says. "Anyway, I really need to go now. You said Shirogane has the lock, right? I'll go and find her-

"W-Wait just a fucking second!" Miu grabs Kaede's elbow. "I forgot to tell you that Tojo is going around asking people what their favourite meals are. I think she's preparing our favourite meals or something as some sort of morbid treat. I'm on my way to the dining hall anyway so I guess I'll tell her yours for you."

"Oh?" Kaede blinks. "But why would you do that for me-"

"I fucking forgot until now," Miu says. "Besides, it's more convenient and shit. If you don't tell me now then I'll just tell her you like shit so-"

"I-I don't really have a favourite meal," Kaede admits. "I suppose I'll just have what you're having."

"Seriously? Ugh, you're so boring," Miu mutters. "But don't you worry your sad, saggy tits! I'll pick a meal that'll blow your fucking brains out!"

Miu leaves before Kaede can even get a word in. She sighs and decides to search for Tsumugi.

Kaede doesn't find Tsumugi but she does find that the warehouse has been locked up tight. She sees that the lock requires some sort of key to open it and presumes that Tsumugi must have it.

When she turns to leave she hears arguing coming from the dining room. Instantly, Kaede pushes open the dining room doors and storms inside, preparing herself for the worst.

"Great! Akamatsu, you're good at talking to people," Kaito says. "Tell Hoshi that he's not allowed to let someone kill him because, fuck, he's still hellbent on his idea he told us the other day."

"It just seems like the most logical choice," Ryoma responds. "Listen, I get that you're all upset but with the time limit getting closer isn't it about time we do something about it?"

"But to ask someone to kill you is rather problematic, is it not?" Korekiyo points out as he puts a hand to his chin. "However, I suppose in a situation like this we need to be thinking more...deadly. If it costs only one life for the rest of us to survive then-

"Don't say that!" Kaede crosses her arms. "Didn't we already say the other day that no one is allowed to die!?"

"Akamatsu, you're not going to get an offer like this again," Ryoma says darkly. "I'm not saying I have a death wish but I'd rather do one good thing with my life and if it means ending it to save everyone then so be it. I understand that no one wants to kill but don't think of this as murder, think

of it as a solution.”

“Don’t be so selfish,” Kaede retorts. “Don’t you have a family waiting for you? What are they going to think when they find out that you’re gone?”

“Not an awful lot,” Ryoma says quietly. “The dead can’t speak.”

Kaede’s eyes go wide as a lump grows in her throat. “I-I-”

“You don’t have to say anything,” Ryoma tells her before looking around the room. There’s only a couple of people inside. Korekiyo and Kaito are sitting at the table and Kaede is at the entrance. “No one does. I’m only offering you all this opportunity because it’s the right thing to do. Don’t think I’m offering because I want the game to start, that’s the last thing I want.”

“But you can’t just give up either!” Kaito slams his hands onto the table, causing all the plates and cutlery to rattle. “Only someone who is weak and pathetic would give up now! You think you’re just helping us but you’re just trying to find an easy way out! All this talk about dying and giving up...it pisses me off!”

“I’m sorry you feel that way,” Ryoma says. “But if no one dies then everyone will.”

“Not if we come up with a plan!” Kaito declares as he stands up, his chair scraping loudly against the floor. “There’s got to be some way of stopping Monokuma before things get out of control.”

“That’s right, there’s gotta be more options,” Kaede says. “So please, Hoshi, please don’t do anything drastic. I promise you that everything is going to be okay.”

“How can you be so sure?” Ryoma asks. “Because unless you’ve got a solid plan then-”

“I do,” Kaede instantly responds. “I really do so you’ve got to stop...stop offering yourself up and live with the rest of us. I’m not letting you or anyone else here die.”

“And what is this plan of yours?” Korekiyo asks curiously. “Do you care to enlighten us?”

“It’s...” Kaede fumbles for the right words. “It’s something I can’t tell you all but I promise this plan is going to be enough to save you all. Please just trust me. I know that I haven’t told you all much but-”

“Hey, it’s okay!” Kaito puts a thumb up. “I believe in you, Akamatsu! If you say you have a plan then you have a plan! But if you need any help then-”

“I’ll be fine,” Kaede says. “Thank you but my plan doesn’t require many people. I’ll be fine on my own.”

Ryoma quietly tugs on his hat. “You sound certain that you know what you’re doing.”

“That’s right,” Kaede responds. “Hoshi, I appreciate that you’re just trying to help everyone and I’m really grateful but I would rather stop Monokuma without anyone innocent getting hurt.”

“You’re too kind, Akamatsu,” Korekiyo says. “And wonderfully optimistic too. However, I do wonder if your blind faith in everyone is going to be your downfall. After all, it’s not like any of us are friends.”

“What the hell are you on about?” Kaito asks. “Of course we’re all friends!”

“I don’t agree to being friends with anyone here,” Ryoma murmurs. He gives Kaede a quiet look.

“You can try out your plan but if things get out of hand then you know what I’m going to do.”

“Okay, that’s only fair,” Kaede agrees.

I’m not letting him die. I’m not letting anyone innocent die.

The relief Kaede feels when she spots that the library is empty shouldn’t feel as nauseating as it does. Kaede all but sprints into the room and climbs up the ladder left conveniently in the right spot for her to quickly fix up the books.

She leaves her backpack on the floor as she stretches up and down, slowly fixing the books back into their original position.

This is just a backup plan. This is just a backup plan. This is just a backup plan. This is just a backup plan. This is just a backup plan.

Bile burns her throat as she opens up a thick encyclopaedia and positions it just right, expanding the path of books just a little longer so that they reach the hidden door. The previous path was too short. Whoever had made it clearly didn’t have time to finish the path or had a different plan. She makes sure that the books aren’t overlapping the bookshelves so that when the bookshelf is pulled on, no books will fall.

This is just a backup plan. This is just a backup plan. This is just a backup plan. This is just a backup plan. This is just a backup plan.

“Ah, perhaps just a little to the left? That book is overlapping the shelf, you know?”

Kaede jolts so hard that the entire ladder wobbles. She grips the top of the bookshelf and lets out a shaky breath as she turns around. Kokichi raises an eyebrow at her as he puts his hands behind his back.

“Hi, Akamatsu! Are you having fun up there?” Kokichi asks as if he hasn’t just walked in on her setting up a very obvious trap. “I swear that the last time I checked up there all the books had been moved so that there wasn’t a path but it seems I was mistaken.”

“O-Ouma...” Kaede’s legs freeze. “This isn’t...”

“This isn’t what it looks like?” Kokichi says for her before snorting. “Are you seriously going to use that line on me? How boring. Although, I suppose what you’re doing right now is totally not boring so...”

Kaede can see the hidden flash of anger in his eyes before he relaxes. “...you’re not supposed to be here.”

“Yup! I wonder what I was doing last time you were setting up a trap?” Kokichi ponders out loud. He reaches into Kaede’s backpack and pulls out the shot put ball. “Hmm, a very effective weapon. I see, I see...”

“Ouma, this isn’t funny,” Kaede hisses. “This is serious.”

“I mean, duh,” Kokichi says before raising an eyebrow. “Killing someone is a very serious crime. Surely you know that, right? I mean, out of all the people here I never expected you to be the one to try and start up the killing game.”

"I'm not starting it up, I'm stopping it!" Kaede pleads. "If we just get rid of the traitor then-"

"Can you use your brain for one second please?" Kokichi asks. "The only person here who has been near that door is Amami. I highly doubt that the traitor has been using it since he's been sniffing around here constantly. If you decide to roll that shot put ball down the vent then the only person you'll be killing is him, you know?"

Kaede flinches as Kokichi drops the ball to the floor. It makes a loud thud. "I-I'll tell him to keep away from the door then-"

"How are you going to do that? He's going to know that you're up to something," Kokichi responds. "Besides, have you not even put two and two together yet? I watched that door all night, Akamatsu, and no one used it. However, despite all this Monokuma managed to return and I bet there's something in that hidden room that helped bring him back."

"Then how did the traitor get inside?" Kaede asks wildly, her heart thumping against her chest.

"A secret passageway? Who knows," Kokichi answers before tugging on his scarf. "But Akamatsu will be making a big mistake if she tries to take the traitor out using this entrance, you know?"

"H-How are you so nonchalant walking in on someone setting up a..." Kaede hesitates as she gestures towards the books she was rearranging. "...trap."

"Becauseeee!" Kokichi smiles loosely as he puts his hands behind his head. "You're so predictable! Akamatsu is so desperate to get everyone out of here that she'll even become a monster to save everyone! Buuut what Akamatsu doesn't realise is that all her efforts are going to be in vain anyway! Not only are you not going to save everyone but you're also going to kickstart the very game you swore to stop if you decide to try and kill the traitor!"

"What the hell are you on about?" Kaede asks quietly. She can feel some sort of hot anger start to bubble inside of her. "Why are you talking like...like we've already taken part in this game before?"

"It's just a theory," Kokichi admits. "But I've been very open from the start about my thoughts on the whole idea that we could have woken up here once before. I mean, I'm not as delusional to think that we're in some sort of time loop because that would be silly and impossible. Hooowever, there's always that possibility our memories have just been, well, erased."

"And why are you telling me all of this?" Kaede asks. She feels like she's going to fall down the ladder at any moment. "A couple days ago you told everyone I was dangerous, which I'm not by the way!"

"I'll admit I do have a burning hatred towards killers," Kokichi tells her as he tilts his head from side to side. "Buuut with what evidence I do have it's pretty obvious that you're not a complete killer, just a little naïve and very, very stupid."

"I-I'm not!"

Kokichi shoots her a dry look. "Ah yes, says the girl who is setting up a trap to kill someone."

"If it means everyone gets out of here," Kaede says as she stares at him firmly, "then I'll do what I have to."

"Well Akamatsu certainly has changed her tune," Kokichi sighs. "Honestly though, I think I'm getting a bit of whiplash dealing with your sudden personality change. No wonder you ended up

being the catalyst that started off the killing game the first time we were here. Or second time. Who knows? Even when someone is literally telling you that you're going to fail you're still hellbent on killing the traitor."

"Because no one else should have to!" Kaede shouts back. She can feel her face turn red, angry tears gathering in the corner of her eyes. "Why should someone else have to go through the absolute torture of having to kill someone else?! Do you really think that I want to do this?"

"No, not really," Kokichi says and Kaede feels her tears finally fall. "I just think you're horribly ignorant and disgustingly selfless. No offence but you'll never make it far as a leader."

"I'm just trying my best," Kaede tells him as she desperately tries to swallow down the growing lump in her throat. "I-I never truly planned any of this. It's just, I, ah, I saw all those shot put balls in the warehouse and remembered the books and..."

"Decided to set up a game of bowling?"

"No!" Kaede shakes her head. "God, you must hate me so much right now."

"Hmm, kinda," Kokichi answers. "But don't take it personally, I've always had a problem with killing and all that. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some important things I must get on with."

Kaede watches mournfully as Kokichi turns to leave the room. However, at the last second he scoops up the shot put ball and cradles it to his chest. "H-Hey, wait a second--"

"Akamatsu is too good of a person to turn into a murderer," Kokichi says as he walks away. "And she's the least boring person here. It'd be a shame if you died so soon."

Kaede is left alone with only her forlorn thoughts to keep her company.

She doesn't stop shaking for the rest of the day.

Kirumi gives Kaede her meal in her bedroom since the pianist has decided to stay in bed.

"It was very nice of Iruma to request me to make meals for everyone," Kirumi says as she places the plate on Kaede's desk. The maid clicks her tongue when Kaede doesn't move. "Please try not to stress out too much, Akamatsu. I understand that in a situation like this it's not easy to be calm but isn't it better to spend your final moments happy rather than sad?"

"Maybe," Kaede says. She tries to smile but her lips tremble instead. "Ah, sorry. I'm just...really struggling right now."

"That's understandable," Kirumi says knowingly. "My apologies, Akamatsu, but I still have some food to deliver. I will come back to check on you later. Please know that you're not alone."

Kaede lies back down as the maid leaves, curling underneath her covers.

If Kokichi hadn't walked in when he did I wonder what I'd be doing right now? Would I be in the classroom waiting for the right time to roll the shot put? In hindsight it was a stupid plan really. How would I have known when to roll it anyway? God, why am I so stupid? All it took was one look at those stupid, stupid shot put balls and I was ready to kill someone!

She looks at the plate of food on the desk before closing her eyes.

C'mon, Kaede. Don't break down now. I can't show any signs of weakness so close to the time limit. If I start crying now then Monokuma will know I'm weak and I don't want that. It's already bad enough that I started to even entertain the thought of killing someone for everyone else. What a joke! Here I am going on and on about trust and friendship yet-

Kaede jumps as her monitor flickers to life. She slams her hands over her ears as a frantic song starts to blare through the speakers. She swears she sees the furniture start to vibrate.

“This is your one hour warning!” Monokuma’s shrill voice bounces around the room.

Ack, why is he playing the music so loud?! It's making me feel sick.

The pianist gasps as her plate of food slips from the desk. She gawks at the mess on the floor. She really should clean that up but she has so many other things she could be doing right now.

This is ridiculous. I wonder if it's any quieter outside?

Kaede dashes from her bedroom, her hands still firmly clasped over her ears. She can practically *feel* the song as she runs outside. She spots Angie and Tenko with their hands over their ears too.

“Tenko thinks this is absolutely ridiculous!” Tenko shouts over the noise.

“It’s not even a good song!” Angie complains. “All of this music is disturbing Angie’s God too! He can’t sleep if it’s too noisy!”

“I think sleeping is the last thing we should be doing right now,” Kaede calls over the music.

Tenko pulls a face. “What was that?! Tenko can’t hear you!”

“I said...oh forget it!” Kaede winces as she looks around. There’s nowhere for her to even hide from the noise. Monokuma must be trying to make them all desperate or something. Kaede quickly feels a headache start to grow.

She spots Kiibo stumble from the dormitories in a daze, almost falling over in the process.

“Is my hearing function broken or is someone playing really loud music?” Kiibo shouts a little too quietly. He pouts when the three girls stare at him in confusion. “I said is my hearing function broken or-”

“I don’t think this is working!” Kaede shouts back at him. “Maybe we should move somewhere else?”

“It’s even louder inside!” Tenko cries. “Ugh, Tenko is getting a really bad headache from this horrible music! Why is Monokuma torturing us?!”

“He’s punishing us for not killing each other!” Kaede answers. Her throat is starting to hurt. “That has to be it!”

“Angie thought punishments were reserved for if we do bad things?” Angie questions. “As far as Angie knows, no one has done anything to break the rules! So this is super unfair! It’s not Angie’s fault that no one is dead, y’know!”

“Someone dying is the last thing we want!” Kiibo cries out in horror.

Kaede ends up going into the school hoping that she’ll at least find a quieter room to hide in. She also wants to keep an eye on people. So far she knows Kirumi, Angie, Tenko and Kiibo are safe.

With the time limit nearing its end...

She heads upstairs on wobbly legs, trying her best to ignore the music that's only getting louder. She spots Gonta in the room full of bugs, desperately trying to keep all of the cages from falling off the shelves. Ryoma is helping him.

Korekiyo is further upstairs, talking to himself in the room full of artefacts. She leaves him be and climbs up one last flight of stairs.

The top floor is only a touch quieter than the rest. Kaede sighs as she puts a hand to her head. It feels like someone has grabbed her brain and started to shake it relentlessly. She puts a hand on the wall to try and balance herself as she glances into all the rooms one by one.

She makes it to the room with the cosy fireplace and almost chokes in surprise when she sees the floor covered in shattered glass. Instantly she puts a hand to her face, covering her mouth and nose as she staggers backwards.

Shit, what the hell happened up here? Did the music cause the cabinets to fall over perhaps? But...huh? They're not moving. I think they're too heavy to be affected by the music. But if that's the case then how did all the bottles end up on the floor?! Actually, wait a second...

Kaede removes her hand from her face as she peers back into the room. She feels an endless pit grow in her stomach as a horrifying realisation hits her.

Only the antidotes have been smashed! All the poison bottles are still on the shelves! God, what the hell does this mean?! Clearly someone has come up here and broke all the antidote bottles for a reason, right?! D-Does that mean...

"Oh shit!" Kaede feels an overwhelming wave of nausea hit her as she sprints downstairs and runs up to people one by one, asking them if they've eaten anything strange or if anything they have had tasted funny.

"Gonta only ate his food Tojo made for him!" Gonta answers her.

"What's wrong, Akamatsu?" Ryoma asks curiously. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"S-Someone has smashed all the antidotes on the floor upstairs and, and..." Kaede takes a deep breath. "Shit, I think someone has been poisoned! I-I don't know who or when or-"

"Hey, deep breaths..." Ryoma frowns. "It seems that someone has finally cracked."

"Someone been poisoned?!" Gonta looks around in distress. "Who?! C-Can Gonta save them?!"

"We need to find out who," Kaede says quickly. "I've already checked in on Shinguji upstairs and he said that he was about to eat his meal Tojo made him so-"

"We've got to stop Tojo from handing out the meals," Ryoma tells her before grunting. "Gonta, stay with Akamatsu and help her find people. You need to warn people to not eat anything and stay together, got it?"

"Okay, Gonta can do that!" Gonta agrees.

"And if you start to feel sick then tell someone right away," Kaede adds. She takes a deep breath. The last time she ate was at lunch so hopefully she's okay. She hasn't felt weak or anything which can only suggest that someone has poisoned something only recently. "That's the same for you too,

Hoshi. I'm sure we can sort something out-"

"Akamatsu, not to be rude but there's no time for rambling," Ryoma says. "We've got to get a move on."

Ryoma leaves to presumably find Kirumi and stop her from handing out anymore meals.

Gonta gives Kaede a worried look. "Akamatsu? Is someone going to die?"

Kaede feels her mouth go dry as she furiously shakes her head. "Don't worry, Gonta. Everything is going to be okay!"

"Gonta hopes so," Gonta says. "But we really need to find people and stop them from eating or drinking anything! If we don't then someone is going to get really sick and Gonta not know how he will be able to help them!"

The two quickly run into Angie, Tenko and Kiibo, who are still outside.

"T-Tenko already ate her food," Tenko admits as she presses two fingers together. "But she doesn't feel bad so..."

"Angie knows that Angie is safe because God says so," Angie says.

Kiibo looks rather frazzled. "Obviously I'm fine since I can't eat but who would do such a thing? I thought everyone was doing okay!"

"Someone must've gotten scared," Kaede says. "Really scared. Look, if any of you see anyone then tell them to be careful and not to eat anything!"

"Or drink!" Gonta helpfully adds. "Ah! Gonta see Momota! Heeey, Momota! Gonta got something really important to tell you!"

Kaede spots Kaito by the dormitories. The astronaut clearly was about to head inside. However, after spotting the group of people outside his face lights up.

"Hey, I was looking for people!" Kaito admits cheerfully. "So I was thinking of making a group-"

"Momota!" Kaede stops him in his tracks. "You haven't had anything to eat or drink recently, right?!"

"Woah! What's wrong, Akamatsu? You look like you're about to cry!" Kaito looks at her with worry in his eyes. "Listen, everything is going to be okay so-"

"Momota, you're not listening to me!" Kaede shouts. "Have you had anything to eat or drink?!"

"I mean, I recently finished a meal Tojo made for me but that's about it," Kaito admits. "Why? Is something wrong?"

"Someone been poisoned!" Gonta answers with wide eyes. "Momota not been feeling ill has he?!"

"Me? Ill? Hah, don't make me laugh!" Kaito scoffs before frowning. "But for real? Someone has been poisoned? Who?!"

"We don't know yet," Kaede tells him. "I went upstairs and saw all the antidotes had been smashed so I thought..."

Kaito shakes his head with a sigh. "Damn it, someone must've gotten spooked."

"We should find Tojo and ask her if she's seen anything suspicious in the kitchen," Tenko suddenly suggests. "All of the food here comes from there, right? So if someone has poisoned something then they would've been spotted in the kitchen or dining room."

"But a lot of people have been in the dining room today," Kaede frets nervously. "And Hoshi has already left to find Tojo."

"The dining hall is shut too because it's well past night time," Kiibo adds. "Tojo left the food out on the tables on the way to the gym. However, she's been so busy today that she was only able to deliver the food to people now."

"That means the food has been left alone for long stretches of time," Kaede says as she clenches her hands into fists. "Anyone could've done something to it."

"Why did Tojo make food for everyone at the last minute anyway?" Kaito asks.

"Angie knows, Angie knows!" Angie cheerfully declares. "Angie heard Miu ask for the food to be made as a last meal for everyone but Kirumi was so busy that she said she'd have to make it later since it was such a last minute request!"

"It's impressive Tojo got thirteen meals made so quickly," Tenko comments. "Although Tenko is grateful, she also would've preferred it if she got her favourite meal. Each meal was practically the same apart from a couple."

"...huh?" Kaede pauses.

Something doesn't seem right here...but there's not enough time to overthink things right now. There's still some people who don't know about the food potentially being poisoned!

"Listen, you should all stick together," Kaede says. "I'm going to find the others and tell them about the situation. If anyone else comes outside tell them to wait with you all! It's important that we all keep an eye on each other and alert people if someone does get sick!"

Kaede dashes inside before anyone can stop her.

So far I've spoken to Ryoma, Gonta, Korekiyo, Tenko, Angie, Kiibo and Kaito. Ryoma has left to find Kirumi so I can take her off the list. That leaves Miu, Tsumugi, Rantaro and Kokichi. They should all be in the school somewhere!

Thankfully Kaede doesn't have to wait long to find the next person as she spots Tsumugi leave the girl's bathroom. She gives the pianist a small wave.

"Ah! Akamatsu!" Tsumugi calls over the music. "I've been looking for you-"

"Have you eaten or drank anything recently?" Kaede instantly asks. She'll feel bad about being rude later. "Listen, I think someone might have poisoned something so-"

"P-Poison?" Tsumugi's eyes go wide. "I, um, ate a meal Tojo made for me but I didn't taste anything odd! Oh no...what if...I did feel a little sick earlier so I went to the bathroom but not super sick!"

"I-I'm sure everything will be fine," Kaede quickly says as she gives the girl's shoulder a squeeze. "I'm looking for some others right now. Have you seen them anywhere?"

“I think I saw, ah, Amami in the library?” Tsumugi says. “Do you want me to go and get him?”

“No, I’ll go,” Kaede says. “What about Ouma and Iruma? Have you seen them?”

“The last time I saw either of them was...” Tsumugi pauses to think. “I haven’t seen Ouma in a while but I saw Iruma go to that building near the garage recently. Do you want me to see if she is still in there?”

“Yes! That would be a huge help!” Kaede smiles at her. “Look, I need to talk to Amami and find Ouma. Just try not to panic, okay? I’m going to make sure that everything is fine!”

Kaede runs off towards the basement, her feet hitting against the steps one by one. She bursts into the library, the door slamming against the wall so hard that a couple of books fall over. However, the music swallows up the sound of the books falling. She spots Rantaro messing around with the number pad again.

“A-Amami!” Kaede grabs his elbow.

He jumps slightly before raising an eyebrow. “Akamatsu? Are you-”

“Are you okay?! You don’t feel sick or anything, right?!” Kaede asks in a hurry, slamming her hand down onto his forehead.

“Hold on just a second!” Rantaro takes a step back. “Did something happen?”

“I think someone has been poisoned,” Kaede tells him. “E-Everyone else is outside but I still need to find Ouma. Have you seen him around or-”

“You think someone has been poisoned?” Rantaro blinks. “Why would you-”

“All of the antidotes have been smashed,” Kaede tells him. “Amami, just answer my question! Are you okay or not?!”

“I feel fine but...” Rantaro tilts his head to the side. “I did just finish the meal that Tojo made for me. Wait, you don’t think that she-”

“I-I don’t know! I don’t know anymore!” Kaede feels her hands shake. “I-I’m trying my best to make sure everyone is okay but I don’t know what to do! Amami, I really don’t know what to do anymore and...and if someone has been poisoned then there’s nothing to give them! S-Someone is going to die and-”

“Hey...” Rantaro frowns as he places both of his hands on her shoulders. “Akamatsu, calm down. Let’s think things through slowly, okay? You think someone has been poisoned, right?”

Kaede nods. “That’s why I’ve been checking up on people and making them wait outside together. That way if someone shows any symptoms then...”

“See, you’ve already been helpful,” Rantaro tells her. “Now, you said Ouma was missing, right? He can’t have gotten that far, I was only talking to him maybe half an hour ago. He said he was going to his room so that’s where he must be.”

“Right...right...” Kaede runs both of her hands down her face. “Okay, we just have to go to the dormitories then...”

“I suppose you want me upstairs too, right?” Rantaro suddenly asks before giving the door a

longing look. "I really want to join you but..."

"I know how hard you've been trying to get the door open but please..." Kaede swallows heavily. "Come wait outside with everyone else. Does it really matter if you get that door open anymore?"

The monitor flickers to life. Monokuma reminds the group that they've only got thirty minutes left to live.

Rantaro bites his lip. "But what if there's something really important behind the door?"

"And what if there isn't?" Kaede counters before hugging herself tightly. "Amami, please. I don't think I can do this on my own. Please can you come with me? I need you."

"You..." Rantaro stares at her dumbfounded before sighing. "I guess if you put it like that then I have no choice."

"I'm really sorry. I know you've been trying to get that door open for days now," Kaede says gently. "But...let's leave it alone. If it was going to open then it would've by now."

"Perhaps you're right," Rantaro responds. He looks understandably exasperated as he leaves the library with Kaede.

They head back upstairs with each other when Kaede stops. Her head is throbbing and the insanely loud music is making her feel sick. She taps Rantaro's elbow, silently telling him to stop. "I'm just going to go to the bathroom quickly and splash some water on my face. I think I need to cool down or something."

"Are you okay?" Rantaro asks. "You didn't eat anything or-"

"It's the music," Kaede tells him. "I have particularly sensitive ears so this music is giving me a really bad headache right now."

"Ah, I see," Rantaro says. "Do you want me to go to the dormitories and get Ouma?"

"Yeah, please."

They part ways, Kaede pushing open the bathroom door with both of her hands before staggering over to the sink. She grips both sides of it with shaky hands, her knuckles turning pale as she gasps in a couple of breaths.

The tap squeaks as she twists it on, water instantly pouring into the sink. She splashes cold water onto her face, squeezing her eyes shut as her head throbs in pain.

Everything is going to be fine, Kaede. Chin up! You've gotten this far. Now is not the time to crumble!

She opens her eyes and looks at herself in the mirror. She stares at her reflection as if she's never seen herself before. Blonde hair. Purple eyes. Slight bags under her eyes. Flushed cheeks from all the running she's been doing. Dry lips from where she's been biting them. She sighs at her rough appearance and splashes another handful of water onto her face, hoping that'll make her look better.

Once again she opens her eyes and stares. She lets out a choked gasp as she notices something new in the reflection. There's a hole in the wall that wasn't there before. She spins around just in time to catch a body that suddenly collapses on top of her.

“...Ou...ma?”

Kaede brings herself and Kokichi to the floor slowly. She doesn't even feel like she's in her own body anymore as her knees hit the bathroom floor. Her eyes flicker from Kokichi to the hole in the wall and watches as the hole is filled in by a hidden piece of wall.

Another secret door?!

A horrible gargle pulls her out of her thoughts and Kaede looks down to see Kokichi hunched over on the floor. He has a hand to his mouth but it's not enough to stop the sudden stream of blood pool from his mouth. Kaede watches in shock as the floors quickly go from white to pink.

“O-Oh my God...” Kaede leans over and rubs his back as the gut churning realisation sinks in. She's finally got her answer. She knows where the poison went. “W-We need to...” Kaede's hands shake violently as she looks around desperately. “We need to find something to...”

She feels something be pressed into one of her hands but doesn't even get the chance to look at what it is before Kokichi lifts up his head to look at her. Kaede learns what true fear is after looking into his eyes. They're wide and desperate and begging and helpless and...

“Sh...” Kokichi opens and closes his mouth before another mouthful of blood trickles from it. “Sh...”

“She?” Kaede asks frantically as she pulls him closer. She doesn't know what to do.

Please...someone help me. Someone help him. I don't know what to do! I can't move my legs. I can't...save him.

Maybe Kokichi realises that he's not going to be able to talk anymore. He gives Kaede one last look before staring at her hand. He then leans against her, blood seeping through his fingers as his body trembles. It gets on Kaede's skirt and vest but she doesn't care. She holds him tightly, completely at a loss as she rocks him helplessly.

She doesn't remember much after that.

She doesn't remember the music stopping.

She doesn't realise the room has gone silent and that she's cradling a body until the door bursts open and Tsumugi starts screaming.

Kaito lends her his jacket as she sits outside.

She can vaguely hear Monokuma rambling on about something she really doesn't care about right now. She's sat on a bench, her head resting on Rantaro's shoulder. She hasn't said a word ever since Kirumi and Rantaro carefully pried her hands off of Kokichi's body.

“You all had me going there for a moment,” Monokuma admits. “I really thought that a murder wasn't going to happen!”

“Shut the hell up,” Kaito snaps. “This is your fucking fault you-”

“I didn't kill him!” Monokuma says, gesturing towards the school. He had told the students to go outside as there wasn't enough room for everyone to crowd into the girl's bathroom. “But one of

you certainly did!”

“Who would do such a thing?!” Tsumugi sniffs. “I-I really thought that no one was going to...”

Ryoma tugs on his hat. “It looks like someone snapped at the last second...”

“Gonta no understand!” Gonta cries. “Ouma may have liked to cause trouble but he was not a bad person! Why is he dead?”

“Perhaps his killer can explain that one!” Monokuma happily responds. “Now, now, there’s no need to be shy! The First Blood Perk is still up for grabs, you know? I was starting to get worried that my very generous gift was going to go to waste for a moment!”

“Shut up, just shut up,” Ryoma snaps. “Are you happy now?”

“Very!”

“...so who did it?” Kiibo asks quietly. “I don’t think Ouma was the type of person who would’ve killed himself so...”

“Angie thinks whoever killed Ouma should reveal themselves now so they can start repenting for their sins,” Angie says with a scary smile.

Monokuma patiently grins as he looks at the students. His grin only grows wider as a hesitant hand is put into the air. “And there we have it folks, the very first graduate of the killing game!”

Kaede grips the edges of Kaito’s jacket tightly as she watches everyone turn to face the person with their hand high in the air.

Miu Iruma swallows before lowering her hand. “I...”

“It was you?” Kirumi asks in surprise. “You killed Ouma?”

“T-This has to be a mistake! There’s no way a girl is the killer!” Tenko quickly blurts out. “Iruma, tell everyone that this is a mistake! You’re not guilty, right?”

“She sure does look guilty,” Ryoma says darkly.

Miu trembles. “I-I just wanted to go home...”

“So you killed Ouma?!” Kaito clenches his fist. “Fucking hell, Iruma! Why would you stoop that low?!”

“Getting angry is only a waste of energy,” Korekiyo tells the astronaut calmly.

“But Gonta want to know why Miu killed Ouma! Ouma wasn’t bad person, he was one of us!” Gonta sobs as he wipes his face with the sleeve of his jacket. “No one should’ve died! Gonta should’ve tried harder to look after everyone!”

“This isn’t your fault, Gonta,” Ryoma tells him with a sigh. “By the way, I thought Akamatsu had made a list of all the poisons upstairs. Did you not notice that one of them went missing?”

Kaede shakes her head, feeling numb. “Nothing had gone missing last time I checked...I don’t understand.”

“Hey! What did Miu use to poison Ouma with then?” Angie asks, turning to face Miu. “Did she

make her own poison or something?"

"...Bakamatsu forgot to count one," Miu admits quietly.

Kaede bites down on her lip. "I...did?"

"I was there when she was listing everything," Miu says. "Monokuma came in half way through and scared me so I dropped an antidote. However, the poison that went with it was fine so..."

"Instead of reminding Akamatsu about the leftover poison, you took it instead," Kirumi finishes for her. "Because the list Akamatsu gave me said that there was an equal amount of poisons and antidotes. Additionally, I was not told an antidote was spilt on the floor."

"I didn't..." Kaede swallows. "I was so busy that I didn't realise..."

"You did nothing wrong!" Tenko says fiercely. "You were just trying to help everyone!"

"But if I had noticed that one was missing or actually used my stupid brain for one second then..." Kaede's voice catches. Tears clump her eyelashes together. "Then none of this would've happened."

"Hold on, Akamatsu," Rantaro says as he gives her shoulder a reassuring rub. "None of this is your fault so don't go blaming yourself."

"Of course it's my fault! Everything is!" Kaede cries as she curls in on herself. "I-If I had realised that there should've been an extra poison then Ouma would still be alive. A-And when I found him I just sat there-"

"You were in shock," Kirumi explains carefully. "Akamatsu, you really must stop blaming yourself."

"The only person at fault here is...Iruma," Kiibo says sadly.

"Why Ouma?" Korekiyo asks curiously. "I understand he was rather strange but I don't think he wronged you in any way."

"I didn't have anyone planned in particular," Miu admits with a sniff. "I just...wanted to get out of here."

"So much that you killed someone?" Kaito asks through gritted teeth.

"I was fucking desperate, okay?!" Miu snaps. "I-I refuse to fucking die here! Sooner or later someone was going to fucking come after me and people have already gotten out of here before so why can't I?!"

"They never killed to leave!" Kaito argues furiously. "You did!"

"If those fuckers cared about us then they would've come back by now!" Miu shouts. "They left us all to die here! What choice did I have?!"

"Now, now, children," Monokuma coos softly. "Let's not argue. After all, don't you want to give the graduate a warm goodbye? This is the last time some of you will be seeing her, you know?"

"I actually get to leave? Scot free, right?" Miu asks desperately. "No strings attached?"

"No strings attached!" Monokuma agrees.

“Even though one of us gets to leave I can’t help but feel...irritated,” Korekiyo grumbles.

“Gonta know Miu did bad thing but Miu also gets to leave and be safe,” Gonta says. “Maybe we should be happy for her that at least she doesn't have to die.”

“You’re too good for us,” Ryoma mutters.

“Tenko doesn’t agree with what Iruma has done but...” Tenko closes her eyes. “Tenko is also happy no one else has to die today. One death is sad enough so Tenko is glad that there doesn’t have to be two.”

“If anyone is at fault here it’s Monokuma,” Kiibo says. “It was him who pushed Iruma to do this, after all.”

“But Miu was the only one of us who resorted to murder,” Angie says. “And Angie isn’t sure if she can forgive her for that.”

Miu freezes as she presses her palms into her face. “I’m fucking sorry okay...”

“For such a happy event I don’t see much celebrating going on,” Monokuma complains. “Oh well, I suppose it can’t be helped! Now, if Miss Iruma would like to follow me!”

Monokuma waddles off towards the red door further away. Miu follows after him, pausing once she reaches the steps.

“I’m...sorry,” Miu murmurs softly. “Once I get out of here...”

“Just go,” Kaito snaps. “Save your apologies.”

Miu bites her lip before nodding. “If I find a way to help then...”

“Iruma...” Kiibo looks the most upset Kaede has seen him as the pink inventor gives the robot a watery eyed look before dashing off.

“Tsk...” Kaito shakes his head. “I can’t tell if I’m more pissed off at her or at Monokuma at the moment.”

“I am not trying to justify her actions but in a situation like this...” Kirumi hesitates before sighing. “We should’ve been more careful and kept a closer eye on each other. However, I would also like to apologise for not realising she was planning something earlier. I thought it was strange that she requested meals so close towards the time limit but I simply thought nothing of it.”

“Please don’t blame yourself, Tojo,” Tenko says. “No one here should feel guilty.”

“It’s just...so sad,” Tsumugi says between snuffles. “We’re all saved but at what cost?”

“Ouma...” Gonta answers sadly.

“I don’t think she was expecting an answer,” Korekiyo says before shaking his head. “But she is right. Because of Iruma’s actions we’re all alive right now. I think we should consider this situation a blessing in disguise.”

“But for someone to die so we can live...” Tenko clenches her fist. “Tenko hates this!”

Kaede closes her eyes as she blocks out the sounds of her classmates talking to each other. Her headache has turned into a dull throb, something that she is able to deal with more easily.

I failed. I let him down. I let everyone down.

She opens up her eyes slowly and looks down at her hand.

Why did he give me this? I don't understand. Is there something he wants me to see?

Tangled in a thin orange ribbon is Kokichi's bedroom key. Kaede squeezes it tightly before hiding it up her shirt sleeve.

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 2 Part 1

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry for the long wait! Truthfully I've been struggling to want to write lately and only recently managed to convince myself to get this chapter done. Hopefully this chapter is okay ahaha

Thank you for reading! I hope you all have a nice day!

Kaede slips into Kokichi's room in the early hours of the morning.

She uses the orange fabric, something she swears she's seen someone in the school wear before, as a makeshift necklace. She slides the key through the fabric and wears the fabric around her neck, tucking the key behind her pink vest.

Kokichi's room is interesting to say the least. Messy. Unorganised. Stuffed to the brim full of stuff she doesn't really recognise. There's plenty of stuff that catches her eye. There's the whiteboard covered in photographs. Then there's the dangling wax figure of Rantaro by the bed. Why on earth Kokichi had that will forever remain a mystery, she realises. There's also the endless stacks of boxes that are brimming with different items and pieces of paper. What's even more curious is that most of the pieces of paper have writing on them.

Feeling overwhelmed, Kaede sits on the edge of Kokichi's bed. She very quickly realises that the bed hasn't even been slept in once since the pillows look untouched and the duvet is still tucked in under the mattress. However, she's careful not to disturb the bed too much. After all, this isn't her room.

That doesn't stop her from picking up the strange mask of a horse's head however. She places it on her lap and stares at it with a frown.

Out of everything in this room, how come it's this mask that confuses me the most? How the hell did he end up with something like this in the first place anyway?

With a sigh Kaede places the mask back down onto the bed next to a colourful tablet. She raises an eyebrow at the tablet. Did Kokichi get a case for his tablet or something? Then again, this tablet looks a lot different to her own. She picks it up and runs her finger along the power button before pausing.

This isn't mine to use. It'd be wrong for me to use it.

With a guilty expression Kaede places the tablet back down onto the bed before placing her hands on her lap, taking in the state of the room. The most obvious thing about the room is how messy it is. If Kirumi saw the state of the room then she'd have a fit or at the very least empty it out. Kaede has a feeling that Kokichi wanted his room left untouched. Maybe that's why he left her his key.

Or maybe he wanted to leave the key with someone else but since I was the only person there when he died, ended up giving the key to me instead. I'm really not sure. I'm just confused why he trusted me with his bedroom key anyway. The last time we spoke he...

Kaede isn't going to pretend that she and Kokichi were friends. Maybe if things were different then maybe they could've been. She likes to think that if things were different then...never mind. Dwelling on what ifs is only going to make her thoughts turn dark. There's only so much self loathing she can endure before she crumbles. She already feels bad enough that she froze when she found him in the bathroom.

It's not like she hasn't already gone through all the different alternative scenarios in her head, scenarios of her picking Kokichi up and dashing him upstairs to find a hidden bottle of antidote, scenarios of her finding Kokichi just a little earlier and getting him help, scenarios of someone else find him and having to cradle his body as the life drains from his eyes. That scenario makes her feel selfish. She feels like her heart has turned rotten. Of course she wouldn't wish what happened to her on anyone else.

There's still blood on her clothes and under her fingernails. She hasn't changed yet and she's almost scared to. Once her clothes get washed then the very last trace of Kokichi Ouma will be gone forever. His body has already been moved. The blood covering her is the only proof that he ever existed.

He was here and now he's not.

Kaede's fingernails dig into her palms as she takes a deep breath.

Enough is enough, Kaede. From now on you're going to stop being so pathetic. I know things are hard but...get a grip. Kokichi left you his bedroom key for a reason. I'm not sure why yet but right now you're the only person in the entire school who has the opportunity to be in this room right now. Just look around! This place is practically a gold mine when it comes to finding some answers!

She takes a look at the whiteboard and looks at all the different pictures on it. She spots herself rather quickly, having been tucked away on the top left of the board. She's been paired with Rantaro and she spots that a shot put ball has been doodled near her. She swallows down a particularly thick lump in her throat as she moves on.

Ryoma and Kirumi have been paired together with a little fish and a rubber ring drawn next to them both. Kaede spots a rubber ring on the floor and wonders what it could've been used for.

Angie and Tenko have been put next together and paired with Korekiyo. There's a drawing with someone with a sword in their stomach, a rectangle and what looks to be a sickle next to the group of three. Kaede wonders what all the drawings mean.

There's then Miu and Gonta with a small drawing of toilet paper next to them both. Kaede raises an eyebrow wordlessly and moves on.

There's a big cluster of people put together, including Kaito, Kiibo and Tsumugi. Kaede also spots two girls. Maki and Himiko? They don't have any doodles surrounding them, which is strange. The group is labelled as suspicious however.

Then there's the lone picture of a guy. Shuichi? The only way he's been described is as 'trustworthy?'. Kaede wonders if that's true.

Finally, there's a large group of photos at the bottom of the board of some colourful bears that look sort of like Monokuma. Kaede wonders if these bears are the children Monokuma has been going on about. They've been described as annoying, according to Kokichi's whiteboard.

It looks like he's been taking notes but obviously something is wrong. First off, the three graduates are on the board and the notes suggest that Kokichi has interacted with them all before. Second, the pairs on the board look like...

Kaede looks at herself and then at Rantaro.

"If you decide to roll that shot put ball down the vent then the only person you'll be killing is him, you know?"

She's glad she's sat on the bed because if she was standing up right now then she knows she'd be on the floor. Shit, maybe Kokichi really was onto something. Didn't he mention about everyone being here before? Is it really possible that they all woke up here once before and played the killing game? No, that just doesn't seem right. After all, this whiteboard suggests that so many people should be dead right now and from the looks of things, the only three people who should be alive are missing.

Perhaps this is all just one big joke? That's a possibility.

Or maybe I'm just trying to hide from the truth that Kokichi had been trying to hint at so many times.

Kaede thinks back to the whiteboard outside, the one with the list of threats and victims and graduates. Kokichi hadn't even hesitated to put her in the dangerous group. In fact, he put quite a few people on it before Monokuma had gleefully added two more. Back then, Kaede had no clue why he'd picked the people he did. Now, after looking at the whiteboard in his room, she has a good idea why he did what he did.

I guess he was just looking out for us all in the end, huh? He must've been so confused when he went into his room for the first time and found it in this state. I wonder what his first thoughts were? Did he even believe anything in this room? He must've because not once did I see him doubt himself. There must be some more evidence lying around somewhere to prove that...that this isn't our first time here.

She must be desperate or losing the plot. Maybe guilt has finally eaten her alive? Hours ago she was hellbent on being right, that Kokichi had to be wrong because there's no way she's dangerous and there's no way they've been here before. Now here she is, searching his bedroom because Kokichi is dead and she is alive. He gave her his key and a lot of questions but no answers.

Just for now she'll play along and believe that maybe there's a chance everyone has been here before. It's a truth she doesn't want to accept just yet.

Accepting that Kokichi is right means accepting that I...almost got someone killed. And not for the first time either. If Kokichi hadn't stopped me from finishing the trap in the library then...

Kaede delicately starts to go through the boxes one by one. Some are filled with childish drawings and crayons. Some are filled with instructions and drawings of complicated looking designs on them. A lot of designs have 'Ask Iruma to make' written on them in the corner. Kaede raises an eyebrow and moves on from the boxes, wanting to take a break from looking at all the paper.

She moves onto the desk. There's a microscope which she ignores. Science never was her strong point. She also spots a VR headset on the chair. She only gives it a glance before moving on to find something else. There's a camera at the edge of the desk and under it are some photographs. Curiously, Kaede picks them up and looks through them one by one.

...huh?

The pictures seem to have been taken in the library and they include everyone, even the missing students. Kaede almost drops them in surprise and takes a seat on the chair, moving the headset onto the table as she puts a hand to her head.

The more innocent looking pictures include people like Angie, Ryoma, Kirumi and so on running into the library. However, what's odd is that the pictures also include Maki, Himiko and Shuichi, which should be impossible. It would've made more sense if Kaede had found pictures of them by themselves but the photos show that everyone has met those three students before.

A couple of photos show Shuichi sorting out some cameras. Some other photos show Rantaro walking into a library and opening up a bookcase. The picture that makes Kaede go weak in the knees is the one of him reaching out for a camera, eyes wide and alarmed.

She bites the inside of her mouth before putting the photos back down on the desk. Ah, no wonder Kokichi was so adamant that this is perhaps not everyone's first time here. It's just really strange. The photos look so real but Kaede has no recollection of ever running into the library and getting her picture taken. She also has no recollection of meeting Shuichi or Maki or Himiko.

What those pictures prove is that...something is awfully wrong and Kaede needs to figure out what to do about it. She's already let Kokichi down already and to some degree Miu too. At least with Miu, Kaede knows she's still alive. Kokichi however...

I need to stop this! What's moping around going to do?

Kaede closes her eyes as she goes through everything again.

Okay, so it seems that maybe we have all been here before but no one remembers that we have. The only evidence that suggests we've been here before are these photos, Kokichi's notes and the fact that three people are missing. Monokuma also seemed pretty confused by the three graduated students too. What this could suggest is that Monokuma might have a way of changing our memories or can make us forget stuff. At least, that's the most likely possibility anyway. There's no way it's possible for us to be stuck in some sort of time loop, right? That sort of stuff only happens in fiction!

She must be exhausted. She's too tired to even freak out about this revelation. Instead, Kaede leans back on the chair and closes her eyes, arms dangling by her side as she lets out a loud sigh.

It's getting really late. As much as I want to look around I think I should sleep. I should go back to my own room though. I already feel enough as an intruder as it is without falling asleep at Kokichi's desk. Besides, I'm going to need as much energy as possible for tomorrow. After all, I want to check out the girl's bathroom too.

Kaede stretches with a groan before heading to the door. However, she pauses when she hears footsteps outside and presses her ear against the door.

"Where did she go?!"

"Chabashira, calm down!"

"How can Tenko calm down when Akamatsu is missing?!"

Feeling guilty, Kaede crouches and leans a little more heavily on the door. It sounds like Kaito and Tenko are outside. As much as Kaede wants to tell them that she's fine she doesn't want them to

ask why she's in Kokichi's room and more importantly how she got inside in the first place.

"I trust Akamatsu! She must've gone for a walk!" Kaito responds before huffing. "Finding Ouma the way she did must've scared her. That's why I wanted to check up on her, you know? Just to make sure she's doing okay."

"Well Tenko also had the same idea so she thinks you should go to bed!" Tenko retorts. "Akamatsu must be feeling pretty overwhelmed right now and the last thing she needs is a male talking to her so early in the morning! Don't you know what time it is?!"

"Y-You're up too!" Kaito splutters before sighing. "But man, I'm kinda worried about her wandering around on her own, you know? After what happened to Ouma and everything..."

Tenko pauses for a moment. "M-Maybe we should both look for her? Just to make sure that she's okay, of course! Tenko doesn't usually team up with guys but the sooner we find Akamatsu, the better! Tenko doesn't like the idea of Akamatsu being on her own right now!"

"Huh? You mean you want to explore the school? Whilst it's dark?" Kaito swallows. "S-Shouldn't we wait until it's light out?"

"What? Are you scared?" Tenko taunts. "You're just a typical degenerate, aren't you? You're all talk but as soon as you have to actually do something you just back out!"

"It's not that!" Kaito pleads. "Shut up! I'm as worried about Akamatsu as you are!"

"Then come with Tenko to find her then!" Tenko shouts.

Kaede can hear a door open and shut. There's a pause and then Kaede can hear Kaito groan before rushing after Tenko. Then there's silence.

I should really move but I'm so tired. I'm sure it'll be okay if I close my eyes for five minutes...

Kaede ends up falling asleep slumped against Kokichi's bedroom door.

She ends up slipping back into her room to change as soon as she wakes up. She feels relieved when she notices that no one is awake yet when she darts from one room to another.

After catching her appearance in her bathroom mirror she decides to take a quick shower and watches quietly as the water turns pink when she starts to scrub at her nails. It makes her want to throw up and she quickly lifts her head up and closes her eyes, deciding to instead concentrate on scrubbing her hair. When she jumps out of the shower she puts on a fresh set of clothes before pausing.

Kaede scoops up her other uniform, the one covered in Kokichi's blood, and folds it up carefully before leaving it on her bed. After seeing the state of Kokichi's room it was clear that he liked to collect evidence or stuff. Kaede isn't sure what happened last time everyone was in the school but if Kokichi isn't around to keep tabs on everything then she'll do it herself.

She'll have to ask Tsumugi for the key to the warehouse so she can grab a whiteboard of her own later on. Just as a precaution, of course. She doesn't intend to let the killing game spiral out of control. One death is enough, she's not about to make the body count any higher.

Kaede is moments away from leaving her room when she hears frantic voices outside and she

quickly remembers how she fell asleep in Kokichi's room last night. Her cheeks flush as she hears Tenko once again rush around the dormitories, this time more frantically.

She decides to put the girl out of her misery and opens up her bedroom door, pretending to be surprised when Tenko's eyes go wide when she spots her. However, her pretend shock melts into instant guilt when she sees how red Tenko's eyes are and how desperate her expression is.

"A-Akamatsu!" Tenko wails before pulling her in for a tight hug. "T-Tenko has been looking for you all night! Where did you go?!"

"Ah!" Kaede winces as Tenko gives her a tight squeeze. "I'm really sorry, Chabashira. I must've fallen asleep and just, well, didn't hear you. Did you knock on my door or something?"

Tenko sniffs before nodding. "Tenko knows she's overreacting right now but she's so happy that Akamatsu is okay! After what happened yesterday she was really scared that Akamatsu...was pushed over the edge! Tenko was stupid for letting you be alone last night! S-She should have insisted that she stayed with you for the night!"

"Chabashira, please calm down!" Kaede pleads. "Look at me, I'm fine! I'm really sorry for scaring you but I promise that I'm okay now."

"But Akamatsu was very shocked last night," Tenko says. "You were very out of it and Tenko was very worried. Everyone was, you know? It must've been horrible to find, um, Ouma how you did."

Kaede smiles tightly as she tries to ignore the phantom touch of cradling Kokichi to her chest. "It was. It really was but I'm...doing better now, I promise."

"...Tenko will believe you for now," Tenko says before finally letting go. "Tenko would recommend doing some neo-aikido but we should give it a miss this morning since Akamatsu is looking a little...rough."

"Ah..." Kaede gives the girl an embarrassed smile as she scratches her cheek awkwardly. "And here I thought I looked a little better after having a shower this morning."

"T-Tenko didn't mean to say that Akamatsu looks bad or anything!" Tenko insists desperately as she waves her hands around. "Tenko just thinks that Akamatsu looks really tired, like really, really exhausted. Tenko knows you said that you slept last night but it kinda looks like you haven't."

"I guess I still have bags under my eyes, huh?" Kaede says before sighing. "I promise that I only look bad. I'm actually feeling a lot better this morning. After all, I can't just sit around and mope, you know? Ouma wouldn't have wanted that, I think."

"Were you two...close?" Tenko asks softly. "Tenko knows she's given a reputation for not liking guys but if you need extra time to grieve for him then Tenko understands."

"That's really sweet of you, Chabashira," Kaede says. "But, ah, I wasn't that close to him. I wouldn't even say we were friends but after what happened yesterday...I just have a feeling he'd be pretty annoyed if I just sat around and did nothing."

Instead of gushing like Kaede thought she would, Tenko goes uncharacteristically quiet before giving Kaede a small smile. "Akamatsu does remember what Tenko said the other day when she flipped her, right? It's admirable to see Akamatsu still want to work hard for everyone but from Tenko's point of view, it kinda looks like Akamatsu is pushing herself too hard. You do know if you need absolutely anything at all then Tenko will come running, right?"

The orange fabric around her neck feels like it's burning her skin as Kaede says, "yeah, of course I know that. Thank you, Chabashira."

"You're very welcome!" Tenko says before paling. "Ah! Tenko completely forgot that she formed a search party to look for you! Tenko needs to go and find everyone to tell them that you're okay! You'll come with Tenko, right? Just to show everyone that you're okay?"

"Of course!"

Tsumugi doesn't ask any questions when Kaede asks to be let into the warehouse for a whiteboard.

"Sometimes I like to write down notes when I'm playing the piano," Kaede lies as she heaves the whiteboard out by herself. "Mostly for when I'm composing a song or something. However, I guess I'll just leave the whiteboard in my room for now until I can be bothered to move it upstairs."

"I can help you with that if you want?" Tsumugi offers.

Kaede shakes her head. "It's fine. You need to go and get some breakfast anyway! I'll meet you in the dining hall, okay?"

"Okay?" Tsumugi pauses as she tucks the warehouse key into her pocket. "Um, how are you doing? Yesterday must've been plainly horrible for you. I just wonder how Ouma ended up in the girl's bathroom anyway."

"Perhaps he was looking for somewhere to throw up?" Kaede suggests, trying to keep a straight face. She thinks back to the hidden passageway and how Kokichi had stumbled out of it gargling blood. "I...I really don't want to talk about it, if that's okay?"

"O-Oh! Of course!" Tsumugi blinks. "How silly of me! Things must still be so raw for you right now, huh?"

"Kinda," Kaede admits. She turns around to give Tsumugi a smile before her eyes widen. "S-Shirogane? Where did that scratch on your neck come from?! That looks so painful!"

"I have a scratch?" Tsumugi pauses as she runs a finger down the side of her neck. There's an angry looking red mark there. "I must've scratched myself whilst I was asleep or something! Please don't worry too much about it!"

"You managed to do that to yourself without noticing?" Kaede murmurs in surprise. "Just make sure it gets cleaned, okay? You don't want to end up getting an infection or something."

"Oh don't worry, I'm sure I'll be okay!" Tsumugi responds as she clamps her hand over the scratch quickly. "I can reassure you that I can't even feel it!"

"That's good," Kaede says. "Now go and get some breakfast. I promise I'll be with you soon!"

"Okay..."

Kaede pushes the whiteboard all the way back to her room with gritted teeth. She certainly wasn't expecting the board to be as heavy as it is. By the time she reaches her room and locks herself inside she's breathless. With a sigh she gives it one last shove, rolling it in front of her television screen.

She thinks she remembers seeing some photos of everyone in Kokichi's room and decides to quickly slip into the room and grab them. Breakfast can wait for now. She has more important things she could be doing.

Once she returns along with some magnets and other things, Kaede starts to work. She pins up a picture of Kokichi at the very top left of the board before pinning a picture of Miu near him and draws a line. Carefully she writes out 'Ouma was poisoned by Iruma and died in the girl's bathroom.' She leaves out the part where he fell out of the secret passageway just in case someone enters her room without her knowledge.

She pins the rest of the pictures on the whiteboard and puts them into two groups. She pins up everyone who is at the academy and then the three graduates. Kaede then hesitates as she looks at the three graduates and then at Miu before grabbing another photograph of the inventor and placing her with the group of three.

The Monopad hasn't updated to say that Miu has graduated but after what happened yesterday there's no doubt Miu has. Kaede looks into the inventor's eyes and stares. On one hand she should be furious with Miu for doing what she did. On the other hand there's this sort of understanding why Miu killed Kokichi.

From the sounds of things she poisoned a meal at random. I don't think she had an intended target. I think she just wanted someone dead so she could leave. I can't tell if she's more cowardly for killing someone the way she did or not. However, I can't just forget where Kokichi ended up either. How the hell did he end up in that secret passageway? Did he know about it? Did Miu know about it? Actually, now that I think back on it, Monokuma was kind of desperate to get everyone out of the girl's bathroom.

Kaede pauses as her thoughts run wild. If there was a traitor then they certainly wouldn't kill and leave so soon into the game. After all, if Monokuma is working with someone then he needs that person to be in the school just in case he gets damaged and they can bring him back. That means that Miu probably isn't the traitor. However, it's likely that Kokichi was trapped in the hallway by the traitor...

Slapping both of her hands to her mouth, Kaede stumbles backwards into her bed.

Someone hid Kokichi away so he couldn't get help! Someone put him in the one area where he couldn't be found on purpose! Someone wanted him to die! They found him and instead of helping him they just shoved him out of the way so there was no way of him getting help until it was too late!

Did Miu know about this? Kaede feels her hands tremble. Did Miu and the traitor work together to conceal Kokichi?

Wait, the rules! One of the rules is that Monokuma can't be directly involved in a murder yet Kokichi ended up in that hallway! I call bullshit! The traitor and Monokuma are in the same league so hiding Kokichi so he couldn't get help is cheating! Unless there's a different reason why he was hidden then I'm not sure what's going on but this isn't fair! Monokuma broke one of his own rules and he still expects us to play his stupid killing game?! Wait until I get my hands on him!

Kaede's vision turns red as she storms out of her bedroom and towards the dining room. He has to be there. That's where he always pops up to taunt everyone about some dumb thing. The dining room doors hit off the wall loudly as she shoves them open. She spots a couple people jump but she doesn't have time to feel guilty.

“Where’s Monokuma?” Kaede asks furiously. “I have to talk to him right now!”

“Talk to me about what?”

Monokuma walks past her with an air of confidence that makes Kaede want to punt the bear a million miles away. How dare he? How dare he?! What right does he have to be acting so smug right now, especially after what happened last night? Kaede clenches her fists and stalks after him, feeling her hands tremble by her side as she reaches out for him...

...only to be stopped when a hand wraps around her wrist. She blinks and the red mist that fogs her vision starts to fade away. She sees Rantaro standing behind her with a startled expression.

“I was calling you the entire time you left the dormitories,” Rantaro says quietly. “What’s wrong, Akamatsu? You seem...agitated.”

“Of course I’m agitated!” Kaede snaps as she janks her hand back. “Do you know what he’s done?!” She jabs a finger at the black and white bear angrily and opens her mouth to continue but is cut off.

“Good morning everyone! Aren’t you all grateful to live another day?” Monokuma asks the group. “I know I am!”

Kaede opens her mouth again but Rantaro quickly stops her and leans in close to tell her something privately. “I’m not sure what’s wrong but please just bite your tongue for now. I know yesterday was difficult but if you hurt Monokuma you’ll be in a lot of trouble.”

“I don’t care,” Kaede hisses back. “You have no idea what he’s done-”

“Is this everyone?” Monokuma asks, completely oblivious to the furious blonde behind him. “Very well then! I’ve actually come here with some, how do I put this, complicated news.”

“Complicated news?” Kirumi echoes.

“You see, usually I hand out gifts after a class trial,” Monokuma explains. “Well, I even had some gifts lined up to hand out even though there wasn’t really a class trial. However, these gifts were to expand the school and as you can all see, the school is pretty much expanded to its full potential.”

“And that’s our problem because?” Ryoma tugs on his hat. “You’ve already gotten one murder out of us already, can’t you just go now?”

“Of course not! I’m here to make sure you all have the best experience here possible!” Monokuma declares before drooping, turning a light shade of blue. “But with all these sudden changes it feels like you’ve all missed out on the true killing game experience. You’ve all had less people to target and not enough mysteries to uncover! Worst of all you’re all...” Monokuma gags. “Basically best friends.”

“Gonta thought Monokuma wanted us to get along?” Gonta asks. “Gonta has been trying very hard to-”

“You’re all too nice!” Monokuma complains with a snuffle. “I was relying on both Iruma and Ouma to cause some problems but they’re not even around anymore! What’s a bear to do in this sort of situation?”

“Let us leave?” Angie suggests. “Angie has all her stuff packed up ready to go!”

“Of course no one is leaving!” Monokuma huffs. “In fact, I already have the perfect solution to fix all of my problems!”

Monokuma suddenly pulls out a yellow builder’s hat and puts it on his head with a happy sigh.

“If I can’t give my precious students anything then I’ll just have to take away things from them instead!” Monokuma tells the group. “This is your official warning that the top floor of the academy is now under deconstruction. All the labs up there will be destroyed and lost forever!”

“Labs?” Tenko raises an eyebrow. “What does Monokuma mean by that?”

“Eh?” Monokuma pauses. “You still all don’t know about the labs? Seriously, how off plan has this game gone? Well, you’ve all obviously seen all the rooms that are filled with items to match your talents, right?”

“Oh, like how Gonta found a room full of bugs?” Gonta asks.

“Yes!” Monokuma puts a thumb up. “Those are your research labs specially designed for you all! However, like I said, instead of graciously giving you your labs one by one I’ll be now taking them away!”

“That’s a bit cruel, don’t you think?” Korekiyo asks as he tucks a strand of his hair behind his ear. “You can’t just tell us that you made us labs for us and then just take them away.”

“I’m the headteacher and I can do what I want!” Monokuma counters. “Besides, it’s not like you’re all supposed to have this many unlocked anyway! The only lab that never was unlocked is Ouma’s and he’s not even here to use it anyway.”

“Where is Ouma’s lab?” Kiibo asks curiously. “I’ve not seen a room anywhere full of equipment that would’ve suited him.”

Monokuma waves a paw dismissively. “Doesn’t matter now, does it?”

“So you came here to tell us you’re taking away a couple of rooms?” Tsumugi asks before her eyes go wide. “W-Wait, my lab is on the top floor! You can’t take that away from me!”

“I can and I will,” Monokuma says. “I don’t play favourites, Miss Shirogane. If you have a problem with losing your lab then maybe find a new one to inhabit instead.”

“Don’t talk to her like that!” Kaede bites back. “What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Ah, I was wondering when you were going to join in,” Monokuma sighs. “Good morning, Miss Akamatsu! You’re looking as feisty as ever.”

Kaede glares at him and she knows if he doesn’t leave the room soon then there’s going to be a screaming match. Thankfully, Rantaro steps in. “If that’s all you had to tell us then maybe you should get going with destroying the top floor.”

“Oh, I did have one more thing to announce,” Monokuma admits. “The thing is, there’s only eleven of you left yet the game only started a couple of days ago. I do like a good murder but there hasn’t even been a class trial yet!”

“Get to the point,” Ryoma huffs as he gives the bear a cautious look.

“Well you seeee...” Monokuma puts his hands behind his back bashfully. “I did have another

motive lined up for you all but there's been some...complications. That's why out of the goodness of my heart I have decided to give you all something that I think you'd all really appreciate!"

Monokuma pulls out what looks like a ticket. It's small and has a picture of Monokuma's face printed on it. He lets it flutter onto the table silently.

"Now this may look like a ticket but it's actually so much more than that," Monokuma says.

"Because this is a Super Monokuma Ticket. If someone cashes this ticket in, they'll get whatever they want within reason. Want a rule added to the list? Done! Want a certain door unlocking? Easy peasy! Want me to raise the dead? No problem at all!"

"H-Hold on a second!" Kaede feels her tongue go heavy. "What...What is this?"

"It's a very early and very special motive!" Monokuma says before sighing. "Although I must warn you all that the ticket is one time use and also expires in two days."

"So by one time use do you mean one time each or just once altogether?" Korekiyo asks curiously, giving the ticket a curious look.

"Just once altogether," Monokuma says. "Now, I'm not about to tell you all how to use it! For all I care, make a group decision like rational adults! Or, if you want to give in to your selfish desires, take the ticket for yourself!"

"Whilst this could be seen as a generous gift I can't help but think this is nothing more than an extremely dangerous motive," Kirumi says as she gives the ticket a stiff look.

Angie puts her hand up. "Um, Angie wants to know what Monokuma meant by him being able to bring a dead person back? Can Monokuma actually do that?"

"Of course he can't! He's just screwing around!" Kaito retorts as he glares at the artist. "Quit asking dumb questions!"

"Are you sure you want to be dismissing what I'm capable of so easily?" Monokuma asks. "I think you should all think very carefully about what you should do with this free request. I mean, you could even ask for the First Blook Perk to come into play again! Almost anything is possible, although there's a couple of exceptions so don't start requesting to leave or something!"

Kaede's shoulders tense up as Monokuma walks past her without a word. If there was an air of confidence surrounding him before then now it's an air of smugness that leaves Kaede feeling like she's about to suffocate.

"Um..." Kiibo looks very put off at the ticket. "I think we all need to discuss what to do with the ticket."

Kaito snorts. "You think?"

"And I thought the last motive was overly generous," Rantaro mutters as he gives the ticket a look. "Basically we've been given one free request from Monokuma. How surprisingly nice of him."

"Do you think so?" Korekiyo asks curiously as he leans forwards. "I see this as very dangerous, you see. Whilst Monokuma has done a very good job at trying to tell us that this is a nice gift from him, it's easy to see that this is nothing more than another motive to cause another murder."

"Gonta would never murder just to get something!" Gonta responds as he picks up the ticket carefully. "Maybe we should just ignore ticket? Or destroy it!"

“Angie agrees! Temptation was the main cause of murder last time,” Angie says as she tries to reach up for the ticket. “If we remove all sources of temptation from the school then no murder will happen, yes?”

“Now hold on a second,” Kirumi says as she delicately takes the ticket from Gonta’s hands. “If we sit down and talk about what we want to use the ticket for as a group then maybe this doesn’t have to become a motive.”

“We could ask for something cool, like for all of the men in the world to disappear!” Tenko suggests excitedly.

“We could ask for the top floor to be left alone!” Tsumugi adds. “So I don’t have to lose my lab!”

Ryoma eyes the ticket suspiciously. “Now hold on just a moment. Maybe we shouldn’t be too hasty. After all, it’s all too clear why Monokuma gave us something like this in the first place.”

“Really?” Kiibo puts a hand to his chin. “Why do you think that?”

“He wants us to argue and fall out over the ticket,” Ryoma states. “What’s a better way to start an argument than giving us something like this. It’s obvious that everyone isn’t going to settle on asking for the same thing and at least one person here is going to be left feeling bitter.”

“That’s why we discuss what to do with ticket!” Gonta says before a sparkle appears in his eyes. “Or perhaps we decide who gets to use the ticket! Maybe we can all play a game and whoever wins gets to decide what to do with it!”

“Wouldn’t that put the winner in danger?” Korekiyo points out. “The winner will just become a target.”

“Not if everyone promises not to kill each other,” Gonta says warmly. “If Gonta win then Gonta will ask for Monokuma to bring Ouma back so he can be with us all again!”

“But there’s no way Monokuma can do that!” Kaito huffs. “We’re better off asking him for something cool!”

“Something cool?” Tenko scoffs. “Tenko bets you’d end up picking something stupid if you got the ticket!”

“Hold on! We haven’t even decided what we’re going to do with it yet!” Kaede takes a step forward. “But some of you are right, this ticket is more likely a motive than a gift. I think it’s probably best if we hold a vote on whether to even use it or not.”

“Oh? I didn’t realise you were in charge?” Korekiyo says. “Although I am not complaining. I’m simply surprised you’re even here.”

“Yesterday was...horrible but I’m not giving up just yet,” Kaede answers. She decides to not mention how she’s been feeling all over the place this morning, feeling happy one minute and sad the next. “Something really sad happened yesterday and Ouma should’ve never died. That’s why it’s important we talk to each other more from now on, starting with what we’re going to do about the ticket.”

“Well obviously we’re going to vote whether we even use it or not,” Ryoma says. “If we decide to use it then we’ll nominate someone to look after it. If we decide not to use it then we’ll just destroy the ticket right now.”

“Is everyone happy with that?” Kirumi asks.

Angie bows her head. “Angie thinks that is a fair decision but she would also like to say that using it would be a very silly idea so she’s saying right now that we shouldn’t use it!”

“But the ticket could help us!” Tenko counters. “Monokuma is willing to give us almost anything! We can’t waste an opportunity like this!”

“No matter how you look at the entire situation, it’s clear that something fishy is going on,” Ryoma says. “Sorry but I’m going to have to disagree with you, Chabashira. It’s better to just forget that we even had this opportunity and move on.”

“But Monokuma said he could raise dead!” Gonta says as he clenches his fists. “So we should use ticket to bring Ouma back!”

“Is that really fair though? He’ll just be back in the killing game again,” Tsumugi says with a shudder. She shakes her head. “But I do think we should use the ticket. It’s plain to see that it’ll do more good than harm!”

“Is that so?” Korekiyo chuckles. “I certainly beg to differ. However, perhaps it would be too hasty of me to dismiss the ticket. After all, if Monokuma is capable of even raising the dead then I’d like to be a witness of such a feat.”

“I simply want what is best for the group,” Kirumi says before grimacing. “However, I can’t allow an argument to transpire because of the ticket. It would be for the best if we just disregarded it right away and pretend it never even existed.”

“Something is telling me that...” Kiibo pauses. “Perhaps using the ticket would be a mistake. Iruma decided to kill because she gave into the temptation of getting to leave the school with no trial and Monokuma did mention that someone could request for the First Blood Perk to come back into play.”

“But imagine what we could get out of using the ticket!” Kaito counters. “You’re all blowing this way out of proportion! If we all just decide as a group what to ask for then everything will be fine!”

“What do you think, Akamatsu?” Rantaro asks. “We’re the only two left.”

“Ah, you’re right,” Kaede says as she gives the ticket a wistful look before shaking her head. “As much as I would like to use it to perhaps bring Ouma back, it would be cruel for him just to join the game again. I also think that the ticket is probably going to cause arguments so...”

“Well then, it seems that Amami has the final vote,” Korekiyo points out. “Amami, what do you think we should do?”

“Ahaha, well this is certainly nerve wracking,” Rantaro admits as he rubs the back of his head. He gives Kaede a guilty look. “But I do think we should use the ticket. It’s...clearly a trap and I know that but if we use it right then we could potentially use the ticket against Monokuma, you know?”

“So does that mean we gonna use ticket?” Gonta asks hopefully.

“It looks like it!” Tsumugi announces happily.

Ryoma sighs as he slumps down into his chair. “Well then...”

“If we are going to use the ticket then I want to be the one to hold onto it, just for now anyway,”

Kaede quickly says as she puts her hand out. "I've already said I don't want to use it so there's no way I will so you know it'll be safe with me. Also...I don't want to run the risk of someone getting hurt if they hold onto it."

"But what if you get hurt?" Kirumi asks in concern. "I'll gladly hold onto it for now-"

"No, I want to take responsibility for this," Kaede insists as she flutters her fingertips, indicating for Kirumi to hand it over to her. "It's not that I don't trust you guys but I'll feel a lot better knowing that I'm looking after it."

"No offence, Akamatsu, but Tenko thinks you should be taking it easy," Tenko says. "Tenko will look after it instead and you'll all have to trust that she doesn't use it!"

"Maybe we'll be better off leaving it somewhere instead of having someone looking after it," Kiibo suggests. "There are some lockers by the gym with our names on them. Perhaps we should leave the ticket in one of them?"

"Someone might take it," Korekiyo says. "If we're going to leave the ticket somewhere then we'll need people to guard it-"

"Hold on, hold on!" Kaito puts fists to his hips. "You're all totally overthinking this, you know? We haven't even decided what to do with the ticket yet and we're already bickering! The only way we're going to be able to use the ticket properly is if we trust each other! So maybe we should leave it in a locker but we don't need any stupid guards or anything. Just leave it!"

"I get where you're coming from but..." Tsumugi clasps her hands together hesitantly. "After what happened yesterday isn't it too much to expect us all to trust each other so easily? We trusted that a murder wasn't going to happen and now Ouma is dead."

"Then we're just going to have to believe harder!" Kaito insists as he plucks the ticket from Kirumi's hand. "I'm going to put the ticket in a random locker and then I'm going to come back and have some breakfast! It's too early in the damn morning to be arguing."

Kaito leaves the room without another word.

Ryoma slumps even further down into his chair as he says, "let the arguing begin."

Kaede ends up going back to the girl's bathroom during the afternoon despite the roaring headache she has that makes her want to curl up in her bed and sleep for the next one hundred years. It's empty inside, thank goodness, so Kaede wastes no time dashing over to the wall that she's certain she saw open up yesterday.

She does a pretty good job at not looking at the floor, holding her breath as she feels along the wall quietly. It hasn't even been a full twenty four hours yet since Kokichi died in this room yet she's already back inside. What's even strange is how clean the room is. She can smell the faint scene of cleaning products and she wonders if Kirumi's been inside to give the room a quick wash down.

Her eyes widen as she finally hits something that causes the wall to collapse in on itself. She jumps backwards and is greeted with a small hallway that leads down. She wraps her arms around herself as she realises how cold it's suddenly gone and steps forward, only to wince when her foot lands on something dark pink. Dried up blood. Kaede closes her eyes as she speeds up.

In any other situation she'd probably be screaming at herself for being so stupid for wandering into

a place like this, by herself no less. However, the absolute desperate need to do something helpful, to be able to actually help find something that will get everyone out of here, overtakes her entire body as she quickly speed walks down the dark hallway.

What upsets her the most is the amount of dried up blood there is. It's absolutely everywhere. Here she was thinking when he was gargling blood up in the bathroom was bad enough. It pales in comparison to the dried up blood that smothers the floors and splatters the walls. Just how effective was the poison Miu used anyway? Did she dump the entire bottle into the food or something?

Kaede chews on the nail of her thumb as she starts to reach the end, flinching when the blood becomes even more visible. The entire hallway and room she steps into smells like iron. It makes her want to gag.

The room is a complete one eighty compared to the rest of the school. There's several plush couches that sit invitingly all over the place and a wooden table that has a plate of food on it. Kaede swallows heavily before heading over to the table and crouching down to examine the food with a fork that was left on the table. It looks similar to the plate of food she got yesterday.

Kaede rubs her head. Okay then. That all but confirms that the traitor is another student here. She tries her best to ignore the bitter disappointment that builds up in her chest but it's almost impossible to. After all, someone she thought was her friend is working with Monokuma and wants everyone to die.

She walks away from the plate of food and looks around quietly, eyes wide in awe and surprise. Is this the very exact room Rantaro had been trying to get into the entire time? She spots another door that's black and white. Well, that confirms that then.

Kaede eventually ends up at a large object that is covered by a blanket. With a grimace, she grabs the ends of the blankets and pulls, gasping when a large Monokuma head is revealed.

What the hell is this? It looks like Monokuma but even more gross...

"Um..." Kaede's hand shakes as she gives the head a poke. It doesn't respond but she does see the head blink. "Hey, I know you can hear me, you know?"

The head is either deaf or rude as it doesn't respond. Kaede pouts and puts her hands to her hips. How annoying. She gives the bottom of the head a small kick and watches as the face scrunches up. Well then, it definitely is just ignoring her then. But why?

"Why are you ignoring me?" Kaede asks. "Can you just tell me what's going on? Who are you? What are you? Are you responsible for us being here?"

Blink.

"If you're just going to ignore me then I'm going to find a way to turn you off," Kaede warns as she starts to circle the head slowly, eyes lighting up when she spots a wire coming from the head. She starts to follow it. "Ahah! If you don't start talking then I'm pulling this wire out of you!"

"Pulling that wire out from me will result in your death, missy!"

Kaede jumps at the sudden outburst but can't help but feel smug. "So you can talk!"

"I'm a picky bear," the head says with a sniff. "I was hoping that if I ignored you for long enough then you'd get bored and leave. You're not even supposed to be down here in the first place."

“And?” Kaede bites back. “It’s not like I’m the only person who’s been down here. Both Ouma and the traitor have been in this room too.”

“You think there’s a traitor?” The head asks. “That’s a little mean of you to think so. After all, I thought you wanted to be friends with everyone here? Does that include the traitor?”

“Of course it doesn’t,” Kaede hisses. “And you better tell me who they are or-”

“Now hold on, missy! Who do you think you are telling me what to do?” The head narrows its eyes. “I could have you punished for being down here, you know? You’re not welcome here and the sooner you leave, the better.”

“You can’t punish me. You’re just a floating head,” Kaede says. “At least tell me who you are. You look like Monokuma but...”

“I suppose I might as well introduce myself,” the head says with a sigh. “I’m not just a floating Monokuma head, you know? I’m Motherkuma, the birth giver of all Monokumas!”

“You’re...capable of making more Monokumas?” Kaede blinks.

“I just said I was the birth giver,” Motherkuma says. “Now if you excuse me I’m going back to sleep. Being pregnant all the time is exhausting, you know?”

“W-Wait!” Kaede takes a step forward. “You saw Ouma last night, right? How the hell is it fair that he got hidden away by the mastermind? We had no chance of finding him down here, you know?! The rules say that Monokuma can’t be involved with a murder but it’s practically the same thing if the traitor had hidden him-”

“The traitor and Monokuma are two different people,” Motherkuma says. “Is there a rule saying the traitor can’t meddle with a murder? Nope!”

“But to put him in a room which no one knows about...” Kaede feels her eyes sting. “That’s cheating! Admit it, he was put in here on purpose! Unless there was another reason why he was put in here?”

“Why would I know why the traitor decided to put him down here? All I do is make extra Monokumas when needed,” Motherkuma responds. “If you’re that upset then maybe confront the traitor.”

Kaede wants to pull her hair out. “Then tell me who they are! You clearly know who they are so just tell me already!”

“Not if you’re going to speak to me like that!” Motherkuma grumbles. “How rude! Maybe I don’t want to talk to you anymore!”

“Well maybe I don’t want to talk to you either!” Kaede huffs. “You’re clearly no help!”

“I too am a great help!” Motherkuma bites back. “Without me then there’d be no headmaster here!”

“Then maybe I should destroy you and put an end to the game!” Kaede tells the head as she stamps down on the wire. Motherkuma starts to shriek. “So unless you want this wire destroyed then you should start talking!”

“But I’m not allowed to!” Motherkuma wails. “I can get you punished for this! Not only are you

tormenting me but you're also threatening to kill me! I'm pretty sure you're breaking a rule or two, Miss Akamatsu. Give me one good reason why I shouldn't have you killed!"

"You wouldn't dare kill me," Kaede says. "Because-"

A door opening pulls her from her rant and her eyes go wide. The sliding door in the bathroom just opened! Kaede looks at Motherkuma and at the hallway before shaking her head and bolts. This could be her only chance to expose who the traitor is and there's no way she's wasting this opportunity.

She runs back through the halls and spots light coming from the bathroom. With her heart racing, she reaches the end and...

Sees an empty bathroom.

I'm too late!

Kaede sighs as she slumps against the wall, resting her head against it. Shit. She's just missed her chance to see who the mastermind is. If only she was a little quicker then...

Whatever, she can just go back to Motherkuma and try and force some more answers from her. She presses against the wall that closed up and waits. When the wall doesn't open she nervously presses on it again but nothing happens.

Don't tell me I've been locked out?!

Kaede hits the wall a couple of times before shouting. However, no matter how many times she demands to be let back in, the wall doesn't budge.

Kaede is on her way to her bedroom when Kaito stops her just outside of the dormitories wearing the fakest unconvincing smile she's seen someone wear.

"Akamatsu!" Kaito puts an arm around her shoulder as he all but pushes her into the dormitories and away from some other students who were outside. Kaede raises an eyebrow as Kaito glances around before drooping. "You didn't end up taking the ticket by any chance?"

"Huh?" Kaede blinks. "What are you on about? Of course I didn't!"

"Really?" Kaito rubs his chin. "Well of course I believe you but if that's the case..."

"You haven't lost the ticket already, have you?" Kaede asks.

Kaito splutters. "The ticket was never my responsibility! I was just the one who left it somewhere."

Kaede pinches in between her eyebrows. "Listen, that doesn't matter. All that matters right now is that the ticket is missing and it hasn't even been a full day yet."

"Who the hell would take it so soon?" Kaito asks as his bottom lip juts out. "Just doesn't make any sense! I thought after what happened yesterday that we'd all be able to talk to each other!"

"Me too," Kaede admits. "Does anyone else know it's missing?"

"Nope! I went to check on it a couple of minutes ago and saw that it was missing," Kaito tells her. "But man, I really wasn't expecting this. I was hoping that maybe you moved it somewhere else

for safekeeping but...”

“We need to find it before anyone realises it’s actually gone missing,” Kaede says as she slaps a fist down onto her palm. “Or maybe we should just group everyone together and ask whoever took it to put it back anonymously.”

“Yeah, maybe...” Kaito sighs as he rubs a hand through his hair. “But I’ve gotta admit, it’s a little off putting having someone act like this so soon after Ouma, you know? It’s not even been a full day yet and someone has already...”

“Don’t worry about it too much,” Kaede says. She rubs her forehead. It’s starting to really hurt. “We just need to sort this out quickly before something bad actually happens. I’m glad you told me, Momota.”

“Yeah, well of course you deserved to know,” Kaito says with a grin. “But maybe I should be the one telling you not to worry too much. After all, I’m making finding the ticket my responsibility. You don’t have to worry about a thing!”

“Huh?” Kaede raises an eyebrow. “But it should be my responsibility because...”

“Because?” Kaito pauses before sighing. “Listen, Akamatsu. I know you want to look after everyone but you’re spreading yourself a little too thin at the moment. I’m sure in completely different circumstances that you’d be a great leader but right now you look like you need someone you can lean on for support.”

“I know I can ask for help but I don’t need to,” Kaede explains. “I’ve got everything handled. Mostly. Thanks for the talk but-”

“Where did you go last night?” Kaito suddenly asks. “Chabashira and I looked everywhere for you, you know? I mean, I get it if you just needed some space but you haven’t exactly spoken to anyone about yesterday.”

“That’s because there’s nothing to talk about,” Kaede says with a frown. “I messed up and wasn’t able to protect everyone and there’s no point rubbing more salt into the wound. The best I can do right now is to prevent another murder from ever happening again.”

Kaito looks her in the eyes. “And you think you can do that alone, huh?”

“I...” Kaede opens and closes her mouth before biting her lip. “I don’t know. But what’s the point in worrying everyone when I can sort things out myself-”

“Hey, Akamatsu? What do you think the most important thing is when it comes to astronaut training?” Kaito suddenly asks.

Kaede blinks. “Huh? Why are you asking me?”

“I just want to hear what your answer is,” Kaito admits before waiting expectantly.

Kaede fiddles with her bag straps as she thinks. “Um...don’t you have to be pretty fit to be an astronaut? I suppose keeping your body fit and healthy would be the most important thing, right?”

“That is certainly important,” Kaito says. “But that’s the wrong answer. The most important thing when it comes to training is teamwork! After all, you can’t run a rocket all by yourself! It’s important that everyone in the crew relies on each other for help and support.”

“You do realise that there’s no rockets here?” Kaede tells him. “I don’t really understand what you’re trying to say.”

“I’m telling you that you need to loosen up and let people help you!” Kaito responds as he throws his hands up in the air. “What happened yesterday wasn’t your fault, Akamatsu. Absolutely no one here blames you for what happened to Ouma.”

“But-”

“And if you’re going to keep doubting yourself then what right do you have to keep trying to help everyone?” Kaito says, startling her. “You think you’re helping everyone but you can’t do that until you help yourself. That’s why I’m going to take charge and you’re going to be my sidekick!”

“Sidekick?” Kaede tilts her head to the side. “What on earth are you talking about?”

“It means that there’s going to be less responsibility for you to worry about,” Kaito says with a smile. “Meaning that you can grow stronger without having to stress yourself out! Your worries will be my worries from now on, got it?”

“H-Hold on just a second!” Kaede shakes her head. “I can’t just let you do something like this! I- It’s not fair for you to carry such a burden-”

“I know I can handle it,” Kaito tells her with a confident grin. “I’m the absolute best at looking out for people, you know? I’ve had plenty of sidekicks. I even trained some really famous people too whilst doing my astronaut training!”

Kaede raises an eyebrow hesitantly. “Really?”

“Yep! One hundred percent!” Kaito confirms as he crosses his arms. “Now, I’ve got some searching to do. Don’t you worry about the ticket, Akamatsu! I’m going to sort everything out before anyone else even realises that it’s gone missing!”

“If you say so…” Kaede watches as Kaito dashes away and for a moment she lets herself believe that things will go well for once.

She plans to stay up late to sort through Kokichi’s room.

Kaede falls asleep instead as soon as she’s on her bed. A quick nap, she had promised herself. She sleeps through the entire night, too heavily asleep to even hear the knock on her door.

When she wakes up there’s a note on her floor. She reads it once, twice, then runs out of her bedroom frantically.

Someone must’ve realised that the ticket had gone missing. Kaede can hear a couple of people arguing over it even outside of the dining room. She grimaces as she pushes open the doors, preparing herself for another stressful day.

“This is why we should’ve just destroyed the ticket!” Angie declares loudly. She’s standing on top of a chair whilst Kirumi shuffles beside her, ready to catch the artist if needed. “It was a mistake to keep it! Now someone has given into their greed and something bad is going to happen as a result!”

“You don’t know that!” Tenko insists. “But as soon as Tenko finds out who took the ticket for themselves then she’s going to punch them into next week! How dare they do such a thing so soon after...ah, Akamatsu!”

“Good morning, Chabashira,” Kaede says as she steps into the room. “What’s this about the ticket?”

Even though I already know that it’s missing. Kaito clearly decided not to tell anyone. Well, I suppose people were going to find out one way or another. I just wonder how they found out and if...

She glances over to the person who sent her the note during the night. Rantaro gives her a guilty glance before looking away.

His note said he was the one who took the ticket and had even used it. But why?! I know the note said he tried to wake me up to talk things through with me but I’m kind of upset he didn’t just wait. What on earth is he so desperate for that he couldn’t even wait?

“Listen, we don’t need to make a big deal out of this,” Kaito says as he slams a fist down onto the table. “Whoever took it can just put it back and things can go back to normal. No one is mad-”

“I’m mad,” Ryoma retaliates. “I warned you all yesterday that something like this would happen.”

“I’ve not seen any noticeable changes around the school so maybe whoever took the ticket hasn’t used it yet?” Kiibo suggests. “So as long as whoever took it puts the ticket back then no harm is done.”

“Of course harm has been done!” Angie argues. “Someone has already betrayed us so soon after Ouma! Angie thinks that the person responsible for the theft should cough up now before Angie curses their family for one hundred generations.”

“O-One hundred?” Tsumugi has a bewildered look on her face.

“Everyone calm down! Friends shouldn’t fight!” Gonta waves his arms up and down. “Maybe we should all eat breakfast? Sometimes people are not themselves when they’re hungry! Then we talk after?”

“That’s a good idea, Gokuhara,” Kirumi says with a relieved smile. “Yonaga, will you please get down from the chair? I don’t want you to fall and hurt yourself.”

“Angie won’t fall!” Angie insists but climbs down all the same. She jabs a finger at the group. “But once Angie finds out who betrayed the group then she’s going to have strong words with them.”

“You sound unusually serious,” Korekiyo points out as he nurses a cup of tea in his hands.

“Angie thinks this school will become more peaceful if everyone is truthful with each other,” Angie says. “So Angie is very disappointed that someone has gone behind everyone’s backs!”

“Of course Tenko is disappointed too but it’s not like there’s much we can do about it now,” Tenko says before she jabs her food with her fork. “Tenko was really excited to talk about what to use the ticket on too! She had so many good ideas!”

“What? Like getting rid of every male in the universe?” Kaito says with a laugh.

Tenko pulls a face before jeering. “Tenko has suddenly decided that if she had the ticket she’d ask for you to be removed from the earth forever!”

“So I get to go to space?!” Kaito asks excitedly.

Kaede sighs as she slips next to Rantaro. “Hey...”

“Ah, Akamatsu,” Rantaro says before pausing. “Did you see...?”

“Yeah,” Kaede answers before frowning. “Why did you do it? You never even said what you used it for...”

“You’ll find out in a minute,” Rantaro says before rubbing the back of his neck. “I’m sorry if you’ve been stressing this entire time. It’s just...there’s something I really need to know and using the ticket was the only way I was going to find out what I needed to.”

Kaede quietly pours herself a cup of orange juice before giving the green haired male an unreadable look. “I kind of wished you waited just a little longer to tell me what you planned to ask for.”

“I’m sorry,” Rantaro says. “I’m not trying to cause problems for the group. I’m trying to do the exact opposite actually. Just...trust me?”

Kaede wonders what’s running through his head and goes to speak when the door opens up and like clockwork, Monokuma enters the room. Kaede can’t help but frown as the bear makes himself comfortable. However, she can’t help but notice that he’s looking a little tense?

I wonder what his problem is?

“Good morning students! Isn’t it such a wonderful day today! I bet things would be even better if a murder-”

“What do you want?” Tenko snaps, straight to the point.

“Well I’ve actually got an announcement to make,” Monokuma responds. “And some news. A request was made last night using the Super Monokuma Ticket so I’ve come here to give the user what they asked for.”

“Aren’t you going to reveal who used it?” Korekiyo asks. “After all, someone used it without telling the group what they were going to use it for.”

“Which is totally unfair, I know,” Monokuma sighs. “But a promise is a promise and someone asked for something...interesting.”

“Well then, spit it out,” Ryoma says. “The sooner you leave, the better.”

“How rude...” Monokuma mutters before clearing his throat. “The request made to me was for whoever is hiding their true identity to reveal themselves.”

Kaede’s eyes widen in realisation as she looks at Rantaro, who stares at the group steadily.

He must’ve realised that he was never going to get the door open and decided to go for the next best thing! As much as I want to be annoyed right now I’m actually sort of...relieved that the ticket has been used for something extremely helpful! Now the traitor is going to be forced to reveal themselves and the game can be finally stopped!

“Is someone lying about who they are?” Kirumi asks curiously as she glances around the room.

“I don’t get it? Does someone know something we don’t?” Kaito ponders as he rubs his goatee.
“What’s the meaning of this?!”

“I’m curious myself,” Ryoma admits. “It seems that there’s something someone else knows that we don’t.”

“Whoever made the request clearly knows more than the rest of us,” Korekiyo muses. “How interesting. It seems that there’s potentially two people here with secrets and one of those two have set out to expose the other.”

“Gonta no understand. Has Gonta’s friends been keeping secrets from him?” Gonta looks disappointed as he slouches down in his seat. “But Gonta also wonder what Monokuma mean by revealing true identity! What has someone been lying about? Who they are? Their talent?”

“We’ll find out sooner if we’re quiet,” Kiiibo says as he looks at Monokuma expectantly. “Well, are you going to tell us who has been lying?”

“I thought it’d be more fun if they revealed their true identity themselves,” Monokuma says with a giggle. “Well then, I’m waiting.”

“I-Isn’t this a little cruel?” Tsumugi frets, wringing her hands together. “What if someone is hiding something for a reason! It’s plain to see that forcing them to out themselves is only going to make them hostile or-”

“A request is a request,” Monokuma says, “and I never go back on my word.”

“Besides, this is a good thing,” Rantaro tells her. “The sooner the liar is exposed, the better.”

“I just wonder how someone figured out someone is lying in the first place,” Kirumi says.

“Maybe we’ll never know,” Kaede says. “But I think whoever made this request is only trying to help out the group. I’m not sure why they know more than us but...I think I’m glad they made this request. After all, communication is important and we’re not going to get very far if we’re not open with each other.”

“Well said, Akamatsu!” Kaito cheers. “She’s right! Even though we might never know who made the request we should at least be grateful that they haven’t asked for something stupid behind our backs!”

“But what if they wasted it?” Tenko asks. “Are we even sure that there’s a liar here?”

“There’s only one way to find out,” Rantaro says as he leans forward. Kaede spots his leg bouncing up and down anxiously. “Well then, it seems that no one has anything to say. What happens now?”

“Perhaps some light prompting might do?” Monokuma suggests. “Isn’t that right, Shirogane?”

“Huh? M-Me?” Tsumugi’s eyes go wide. “Why are you saying that to me?! I-I’m not lying about anything-”

Kaede fights to stop her jaw from dropping.

Hold on just a second. Is Monokuma suggesting that...Tsumugi’s the traitor? But-

“Shirogane has something to hide?” Gonta tilts his head to the side. “Gonta no understand. Shirogane doesn’t seem like person to hide things from people!”

“But Monokuma seemed happy enough to draw attention to her,” Ryoma says as he narrows his eyes. “I wonder why...”

Tsumugi lets out a high pitched laugh. “Y-You guys! Monokuma has to be lying! I-I promise! I don’t know why he’s doing this to me!”

“Then why are you acting so shift?” Rantaro asks. He taps his finger against the table over and over again. “So you’re the one who has been lying all this time? To all of us?”

“No!” Tsumugi wails as she abruptly stands up, her chair scraping across the floor. “Monokuma, why are you doing this to me?! Y-You know I have nothing to hide and you’re making me look plainly suspicious!”

“A request is a request,” Monokuma answers. “Well then, Miss Shirogane. Do you have anything you want to say to the class?”

“I...” Tsumugi shakes her head. “I don’t because...”

“Stop it! You’re upsetting her!” Tenko frowns as she looks at the blue haired female and then at Monokuma. “You’re disgusting, you know that? So what if Shirogane has something to hide. If it’s something personal then she doesn’t have to tell us! We totally understand!”

“I think this is a little more serious than something personal,” Kirumi says gently. “Shirogane, please, if you have something to tell us then please do. I assure you that no one here is going to take it personally.”

“Yeah, the sooner you tell us the truth the better!” Kaito gives her a thumbs up. “I’m sure it can’t be that bad!”

“But clearly someone knew she was lying about something and wanted to have her secret exposed,” Korekiyo says. “How interesting. I wonder what this secret is?”

Kaede feels her cheeks burn when Tsumugi gives her a desperate look.

Tsumugi was the first person I found when I woke up here. I know that doesn’t really mean anything but at the same time it does. She’s the first friend I made here! Is it really okay for me to sit back and let her get pushed around like this? She clearly looks distressed but at the same time...there’s a traitor here and the sooner I find out who they are, the better. I just need to accept that one of my friends is lying to me. But Tsumugi? Is Tsumugi really the traitor? Would Monokuma let us find out so soon too?

“We’re waiting,” Monokuma prompts, his typical uneasy grin plastered on his face.

“Um...” Tsumugi hugs herself tightly as she gives Kaede one last look before her face drops, wearing a look of defeat. “I don’t know how...I didn’t want people to find this out...I...”

“Just what has Tsumugi been hiding from us this entire time?” Angie asks darkly. “It’s not something serious, right? Because Angie would be really upset if it is.”

“I’m sure whatever she’s going to reveal will be something we’ll be able to deal with. Together,” Rantaro says. “But there’s no point dragging out the inevitable, right? Shirogane, please just tell us what you’re hiding.”

“You...” Tsumugi scowls at him before laughing bitterly. “This is so cruel! I just wanted...to have friends who treated me like a normal person! And I’m pretty sure no one is going to want to be my friend after finding out...”

“Huh?” Ryoma tugs on his hat. “Just what are you on about, Shirogane?”

“I’m not...” Tsumugi nervously scratches her arm as she ducks her face forward. “My name isn’t actually Tsumugi Shirogane. T-That’s the name I took from *her*.”

“Her?” Tenko gives Tsumugi an anxious look.

“When I woke up here I knew that if people found out who I am then they’d...they’d treat me differently,” Tsumugi says. “So I decided to borrow *her* name and *her* identity and I was lucky enough that Monokuma let me do this, t-that he even changed our names around on the Monopads so no one would figure out I’ve been lying this entire time.”

“Just who are you?” Rantaro asks, slamming his hands down on the table nervously as he leans forwards, clearly desperate for Tsumugi to just spit out her truth.

“I’m not Tsumugi Shirogane, the Ultimate Cosplayer,” Tsumugi says as she takes off her glasses and rolls up her sleeves slightly to reveal two red scrunchies on her wrists. “I’m Maki Harukawa, the Ultimate Assassin.”

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 2 Part 2

Chapter Notes

Hi! I am super sorry that this chapter took so long to come out. Writing hasn't been a high priority of mine lately so it took longer than I would've liked to get this chapter finished. Additionally, this is a super long chapter so please take your time to read it! A lot happens so prepare yourselves ahaha

Thank you so much for the comments! They mean a lot!

I hope you all enjoy my writing and have a nice day!

It's sort of weird. Kaede feels...almost relieved?

"Sorry? What did you just say?" Kaito asks as he puts a hand to his hip. "Ultimate Assassin? Maki Harukawa?"

"Ah..." Tsumugi (Maki?) scratches her arm nervously as she gives Monokuma a pleading look before casting her eyes to the floor. "I, um, yeah, that's me I guess. Maybe I'm not so plain after all."

"There we have it folks! This is what your request has gotten you! One big ol' reveal!" Monokuma announces as he puts his hands to his chest. "Who would've thought that Shirogane was actually called Harukawa all this time!"

"Something doesn't seem right," Ryoma mutters as he narrows his eyes. "Just seems a little too convenient."

"How did someone know Harukawa was lying?" Tenko asks.

"A-Ah! I'd prefer it if you all still called me Shirogane," Tsumugi says quickly, her hair hiding her face as she ducks her head forward. She furiously scratches at her arm. A habit she has when she's nervous perhaps? "I know I don't deserve to ask anything from any of you but the name Maki Harukawa makes my skin crawl, you know?"

"Gonta no understand," Gonta admits as he adjusts his glasses. "Why Shirogane lie to friends? Friends would've understand if she told us her real talent! She not try to hurt us so far so..."

"Don't let her fool you, Gonta!" Angie says, her icy blue eyes shining as she gives Tsumugi a very cold look. "Not only has she been lying all this time but she's been pretending that she's safe to be around! She's a snake within paradise. We simply can't trust her!"

"Now hold on a second! That's way out of line!" Kaito steps in. "Gonta's got a point, she hasn't even tried to hurt any of us so far! I get that you're scared but there's no reason to be because-"

"Do you know Maki?" Angie asks. "Like, like, is she your friend, Kaito? Because we've only been here a couple of days and we've already lost one person! With her here then no doubt something bad is going to happen!"

“Aren’t you being a little unfair?” Tsumugi asks quietly, her voice so quiet that everyone almost misses her speak. “I-I promise I won’t hurt any of you because-”

“Words are just words!” Angie huffs. “This won’t do! This won’t do at all! Angie had plans, you see! Plans for a student council to keep everyone safe! People for Angie to trust to keep everyone else safe!”

“Huh? When did you start planning this?” Kiibo asks curiously.

“Angie’s God told me about the idea last night,” Angie says as she clasps her hands together. “He said that something bad was going to happen soon if Angie didn’t do something and he was right! Now there’s an assassin in our school!”

“M-Maybe you’re overreacting just a little,” Tenko says as she presses her fingers together. “Haru, ah, Shirogane hasn’t actually posed herself as a threat! Tenko also thinks that she looks like a good person too. Oh, Tenko knows! What if Tenko flips her so-”

“No!” Tsumugi yelps as she stumbles back. She itches her arm desperately. “T-There’s no need for that! I, um, I get where Angie is coming from actually! I knew as soon as people found out who I am that this would happen so I, ah, I’ll make it easier for everyone by staying out of everyone’s way.”

“Isn’t that a little too extreme?” Kirumi asks.

“In a situation like this we’re all the same, regardless of what talent we have!” Kaito declares, slapping his fist down into his palm. “Are you all blind? We’ll be playing right into Monokuma’s hands if we fall out over this! We can’t be a group if we start creating stupid student councils or make Shirogane isolate herself!”

“Well someone clearly has it out for her,” Ryoma points out. “Someone used the ticket to expose her identity.”

“How did someone find out about Shirogane anyway?” Korekiyo asks, rubbing his chin. “How curious. If it wasn’t for Shirogane revealing her true identity herself then I would’ve had no clue she’s been lying all this time.”

“That’s another mystery for another day,” Monokuma says before sighing. “This certainly feels anticlimactic. I was expecting more of a reaction from you all.”

“Yeah well,” Kaito murmurs as he lets out a huff, “there’s nothing to make a big deal out of.”

“Nothing to make a big deal out of?” Rantaro raises an eyebrow.

“We should definitely have a discussion about...how to proceed with things I suppose,” Kiibo says as he puts a hand to his chin “Just as a precaution, of course. I’m not saying that Harukawa isn’t a threat but...”

“I thought I said not to call me by that name!” Tsumugi cries desperately, giving her arm a rather furious scratch. “I already said I’ll leave you all alone so just, ah, leave *me* alone. It’s probably for the best that I don’t hang around you all from now on.”

Kaede is almost knocked over as Tsumugi dashes out of the room. Kaito calls after her but is either ignored or Tsumugi doesn’t hear. He gives the group a look of some sort before running after her.

Monokuma chuckles as he prepares to leave. “Whew, I don’t know about you guys but I’m

certainly relieved about this turn of events!”

“How can you be relieved?” Kirumi asks incredulously. “Did you know about this?”

“Well of course I did! That’s why I made Shirogane, or should I say Harukawa, reveal her true identity!” Monokuma answers with a smile. “You should all thank whoever used the ticket! They certainly helped expose Harukawa!”

“We don’t even know who used the ticket,” Ryoma says with a frown. “Or how they even knew about Shirogane.”

“Well that’s another mystery for another day,” Monokuma says. “As much as I would love to create some tension by revealing who used the ticket...well, let’s just say that’ll cause even more problems in the long run.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Angie asks as she narrows her eyes. “Is Monokuma saying that-”

“Let’s not look too deeply into things,” Monokuma laughs before waving his paw. “Anyway, now that the ticket has been officially used, I’ve got a floor to destroy! As despairing as it would be for someone to get accidentally hurt by going upstairs, I insist that you all should avoid the top floor whilst I deconstruct it!”

Monokuma leaves the room quickly after that, cramming a yellow hard hat over his head.

“Well someone certainly has some explaining to do,” Korekiyo says as he leans back into his chair. “Whoever used the ticket should save us the hassle of figuring out who did use it. After all, lying isn’t going to get us anywhere.”

“It’s rather illogical to just expect them to reveal themselves,” Kiibo responds. “Although it does worry me that someone went behind our backs so quickly to use it.”

“Did Shirogane really deserve to be outed like that?” Tenko ponders out loud as she grimaces nervously. “Tenko understands that a talent as dangerous as hers shouldn’t be taken so lightly but...”

“Angie is glad that she was exposed!” Angie says with a sniff. “She’s a danger to our group and there’s simply no room for anyone dangerous here! We should be grateful that she decided to leave us alone on her own accord-”

“Maybe Angie is being too harsh,” Gonta cuts in as he clenches his fist. “Gonta no understand why Harukawa, no, Shirogane has been lying about her identity but maybe she had good reason too? After all, when Monokuma made her reveal herself she looked really upset! Gonta no think that she’s a bad person but...”

“I wonder why Momota went after her so quickly too,” Kirumi points out. “He was very quick to jump to her defence.”

“Probably because Momota is a nasty male with nasty motives!” Tenko’s eyes suddenly widened. “Which is why Tenko should go after them too so he doesn’t take advantage of Shirogane! There’s only ever one reason why a boy gets a girl on her own and that’s-”

“I’m sure Momota won’t hurt Shirogane,” Kaede quickly steps in and squeezes Tenko’s shoulder reassuringly.

“I know Shirogane is going to be a big concern from now on but aren’t we all forgetting the fact

someone clearly had it out for her?" Ryoma says as he tugs on his hat. "Whether we should be grateful or not that someone exposed her should be discussed later. For now maybe we should concentrate on the fact that someone knew about her but didn't tell the group."

"They also wasted the ticket too," Korekiyo says. "I was rather looking forward to Monokuma bringing someone back from the dead."

"Was the ticket really a waste if Shirogane was exposed?" Angie points out quietly.

I think I need to take control of the situation before an argument breaks out. Rantaro has also been really quiet too. I think he must be disappointed that the mastermind wasn't revealed. I don't think he even considered that someone else here could've been lying about their talent. If only we had some way of knowing that someone had been lying all this time. Then the ticket wouldn't have been wasted...

"Come on guys," Kaede says before sighing. "Look, what's done is done. I know some of you are disappointed that the ticket has been used but--"

"Being disappointed about the ticket isn't the main priority," Ryoma counters. "It's the fact that someone here knows more than the rest of us."

Kaede swallows. She can't deny that the situation she's in is rather...uncomfortable. She briefly glances at Rantaro, who is staring out of the window in deep thought. "Yes, perhaps that is the main problem right now..."

"Gonta already forgives whoever used ticket," Gonta suddenly says. "Because Gonta thinks he understands why they used it. Gonta doesn't think they were trying to be mean, they were just trying to look out for group!"

"But they weren't exactly looking out for Shirogane," Korekiyo muses. "Well, that's only if we're considering her a part of the group anymore anyway."

Kirumi raises an eyebrow. "Are you suggesting we kick Shirogane from the group because of her talent?"

"I'm simply pointing out that circumstances have changed," Korekiyo says. "I wouldn't mind observing everyone's way of living with an assassin amongst the mix personally. However, even I can see that Angie certainly has something to say."

Kaede turns to look at Angie, who has her eyes closed and eyes clasped together. "Angie is simply confused why you guys are even considering her being a part of the group. She's super dangerous!"

"She's in the same situation as us," Kiibo says. "And she hasn't tried to hurt anyone here so far. I don't know why she's been lying about her talent but isn't it unfair to judge her so quickly? If she really wanted to hurt someone then she would've done so by now."

"It's not the fact that she hasn't killed someone yet," Angie says. "It's the fact that she could! We don't know what motives Monokuma has lined up for us! What if one of the motives upsets her or something! Then we'll all be dead and no one here could even stop her!"

...I guess I can see where Angie is coming from actually, as much as it pains me to think that she does have a point. No one here is strong enough to stop Tsumugi if she does decide to go on a rampage. No one knows what might upset Tsumugi and we can't just all live in fear of her either. What a mess.

“Then we just leave her alone,” Rantaro says abruptly, causing Kaede to jump. “There’s no point making a big deal out of this and it’s not like we can just kick her out of the school either. I get why some people might be wary of her, hell, I’m wary of her. But...I don’t think she’s our biggest threat here.”

“Huh?” Kaede blinks. Is Rantaro going to...tell everyone that he thinks there’s a mastermind?

“There’s someone else here who is a bigger threat?!” Tenko starts to pale. “Do...do you know who they are?”

“No but...” Rantaro pauses. “Clearly someone here knows a lot more than they’re letting on. Hoshi brought it up earlier, right? Forget Shirogane for a minute because she’s not the person we should be focussing on. Instead we should be focussing on the person who clearly knows more than the rest of us here.”

Hold on a second! That’s you! Well, um, kind of. Rantaro is the person who made the request but he isn’t the one behind the killing game. I know he’s trying to figure out the mastermind but it’s kind of scary how easily he’s managing to cover his tracks. He clearly doesn’t want to reveal to everyone about figuring out that there’s a mastermind but is it really okay to deceive everyone about who made the request?

“That’s right,” Ryoma agrees before frowning. “The only way for us to find out who the person is is to figure out who used the ticket. However, I doubt that’s going to be easy.”

“There is a simple way of narrowing down the suspect list,” Korekiyo points out as he holds up a finger. “Whoever wanted to use the ticket yesterday should be considered suspicious-”

“H-Hold on a second!” Kaede intervenes. “I get where you’re coming from but isn’t it better to consider the people who didn’t want to use the ticket as more suspicious? After all, whoever the liar is wouldn’t be stupid enough to make themselves so obvious.”

“So they decided to tell the group that they didn’t want to use the ticket so people would be less wary of them potentially taking it?” Kirumi tilts her head to the side. “My apologies, Akamatsu, but your logic confuses me. The liar clearly intended to steal the ticket the moment Monokuma gave it to us. I doubt they would’ve thought so far ahead as to think of a lie so quickly.”

“Furthermore, didn’t we decide to destroy the ticket if we decided not to use it?” Ryoma adds. “It would make more sense for the liar to vote for it to be used to make sure it wasn’t destroyed.”

“He does have a point,” Rantaro says calmly. “Now, who were the people who voted for the ticket to be used again?”

“Gonta remembers!” Gonta proudly smiles. “Gonta did! So did Chabashira, Shirogane, Shinguji, Momota and Amami! So six people in total voted for it to be used!”

“I doubt Shirogane used the ticket herself to expose her identity,” Kirumi murmurs as she puts a hand to her chin. “So it’s probably for the best if we eliminate her from the list of suspects.”

“So either Chabashira, Gonta, Shinguji, Momota or Amami used the ticket to out Shirogane,” Ryoma summarises.

Korekiyo hums as he closes his eyes. “Perhaps we should also remove Momota from the list too. After all, he seemed rather upset that Shirogane was upset. Unless, of course, he was simply feigning concern for her.”

“No, I doubt that,” Kiiibo says. “Not just anyone would willingly go after an assassin to cheer them up. It wouldn’t make sense for him to out her and then go comfort her.”

“Unless he suddenly felt guilty for doing so?” Tenko suggests before frowning, “But even Tenko doubts that Momota used the ticket. Yesterday he seemed very certain about everyone believing in each other!”

“So if we knock Momota off the list that leaves four people,” Kaede says nervously.

Is it really okay for me to allow this discussion to continue? Everyone is going to suspect Rantaro really soon. Is that okay? I know that it was wrong of him to take the ticket and use it but he was only trying to help the group. However, if he is exposed as the liar then everyone is going to start questioning him and I know that’s going to make him feel uncomfortable. It’s taken him a couple of days to even consider trusting me. I don’t want to lose that progress if people start pushing him for answers. What should I do?!

“Gonta promises he no use ticket!” Gonta says as he puts a hand to his chest. “Please believe Gonta! Gonta have no clue that Shirogane been lying all this time! He just wants to be friends with everyone!”

“Even Tenko doubts that Gonta was the one who used the ticket,” Tenko admits.

“Shouldn’t you be worrying about yourself?” Korekiyo asks as he slowly raises an eyebrow. “After all, you’re one of the people left on the list.”

“S-So are you!” Tenko shouts back.

“I doubt Chabashira used the ticket,” Rantaro cuts in as he rubs his shoulder. “If she even thought for a second that Shirogane had been lying then she would’ve used her, uh, flipping technique to figure out for herself.”

“That’s right!” Tenko agrees proudly. “Akamatsu can even back me up on this! Tenko has a very special technique that allows her to read people by flipping them! She learned a lot about both Amami and Akamatsu the other day by flipping them!”

Kiiibo’s eyes widened. “Really? I had no clue such a technique existed. I wonder if it also works on robots?”

“Ooh! Tenko has never used her aikido on machinery before!” Tenko’s eyes sparkle. “Kiiibo, Tenko insists that after this you come to her dojo with her! She wants to flip you to see if she can figure you out!”

“P-Please don’t refer to me as just machinery...” Kiiibo pouts.

“So I suppose if we are agreeing that it was someone who voted for the ticket that used it then that leaves myself and Shinguji,” Rantaro says before sighing. “But-”

“Angie thinks this is a waste of time!” Angie suddenly huffs as she stands up abruptly. “It doesn’t matter who used the ticket! All that matters is that there’s an assassin in the school and no one is doing anything about it!”

“But Shirogane not a threat,” Gonta says. “So-”

“She’s not welcome here anymore,” Angie says before smiling. “Angie sees no point staying here anymore. Her God is telling her that she has lots of work to do.”

She leaves the room quietly. Kaede can't help but raise an eyebrow curiously.

"Angie really doesn't like Shirogane anymore," Kaede murmurs. "Although I guess she has a good reason why."

"But no one else is over reacting," Korekiyo says. "Although I must say that for finding out that there's an assassin in the mix in a killing game, everyone is taking it rather well."

"It's simply not as if we can just get rid of her," Kirumi responds. "However, it is important that we keep an eye on her from now on. We simply don't know what her intentions are at the moment. Whilst she claims that she's harmless..."

"A threat is still a threat," Kiibo finishes.

"But the way Angie is treating her is totally cruel," Tenko cries. "Tenko gets that assassins aren't probably good people but, well, it's not like any of us actually know Shirogane as a person! We don't know what she's been through. Judging her so harshly so quickly...it isn't right!"

"So you're okay playing a killing game with an assassin?" Korekiyo asks curiously. "How interesting. You do realise if the both of you did end up in a fight then she'd win?"

"Tenko doesn't want to get into a fight with her," Tenko frowns. "Why would she? The only reason Tenko would ever fight her is if she was going to hurt someone! And has she tried to hurt someone? No!"

"Perhaps someone should talk to Angie?" Gonta suggests. "To try and tell her Shirogane not really a bad person?"

"I doubt she's up to listening to anyone at the moment," Ryoma says before slumping down further into his seat. "Although I suppose it would be ironic of me to judge her for being wary. After all, once you've killed someone people don't ever look at you the same again. It makes you feel...lonely."

"Hoshi..." Kaede bites her lip. "C'mon guys, I think this is enough now. Pointing fingers and distrusting each other is what Monokuma wants. Speculating who the liar is is just a waste of time at this point. I get that some of you are angry that someone went behind our backs but-"

"Maybe we've been blaming the wrong people," Korekiyo says suddenly. "I'm not saying this to save my own skin but it's suddenly occurred to me that it's all too obvious who the liar is."

"Huh?" Kaede swallows. "You mean you've figured out who the liar is?"

"Of course, isn't it obvious?" Korekiyo closes his eyes. "It was Angie who took the ticket and exposed Shirogane."

"You're blaming Angie?" Rantaro quickly asks. "Why?"

"Are you saying Angie knew about Shirogane all this time?" Kirumi adds. "But that doesn't seem right. With her earlier reaction-"

"My apologies for interrupting you, Tojo, but you're misunderstanding me," Korekiyo says. "I don't think Angie knew about Shirogane the entire time. However, I think she must've seen something perhaps last night that tipped her off that Shirogane had been lying about her talent."

"She saw something?" Gonta blinks. "But what?"

“Who knows,” Korekiyo says. “But perhaps we’ve all been overthinking the situation. Perhaps there isn’t anyone here who knows more than someone else but rather someone who saw something they weren’t supposed to.”

“Now that I think about it...isn’t it odd that there’s a room here full of weapons?” Kiibo points out. “I simply thought Monokuma made the room on purpose but maybe that’s not the case. He said that there’s a room here for everyone to hone their talents, correct? Perhaps that room has belonged to Shirogane this entire time?”

Ryoma tugs on his hat. “Did Angie perhaps see Shirogane do something in that room? I just don’t get what Shirogane could’ve done to make Angie wary of her.”

“Maybe we’ll never know,” Kirumi says. “However, I do think that perhaps Shinguji is right. After all, I don’t see why either him or Amami would’ve used the ticket.”

“That’s right, I don’t think either of them are the liars,” Kiibo agrees. “As much as I don’t like to doubt people, I do think that Angie is acting suspiciously. Something...something is telling me that is right.”

Kaede licks her lips. She knows that they’re all wrong. Is it really okay for her to lie so that they don’t suspect Rantaro? He’s being oddly quiet. However, when Kaede looks at him she can see that he looks nervous. Guilty? Despite his expression, he’s not saying anything. Does he want her to let Angie take the fall?

I don’t know what to do! On one hand it’s not as if I’ve purposefully misled them to think that Angie is the liar. However, I actually know who the liar is...what do I do?! Lies can get messy if ignored for too long but I don’t want to throw Rantaro under the bus. I need to talk to him and ask him what he’s going to do. I can tell just by the look on his face that he feels bad yet he isn’t saying anything. However, he’s just going to let Angie...take the fall.

“Even if Angie is the liar,” Kaede says slowly before taking a deep breath. “Maybe we should wait a while before confronting her about it. We don’t know for certain that she *is* actually the liar but I know she’s upset. I just don’t want to distress her even further by questioning her, you know?”

“Ah, that’s probably for the best,” Kiibo says. “I-I’m not angry at Angie! Even she said that she thought the ticket would cause trouble and she was right in a way.”

“It’s kind of ironic she was the one who ended up using it though,” Korekiyo says before sighing. “I can’t lie, I am sorely disappointed I never got to see someone come back from the dead. How interesting that would’ve been to witness...”

“I doubt Monokuma would’ve been able to anyway,” Ryoma sighs. “But Akamatsu does have a point. Angie is upset right now and we’ll only be making things worse if we push her too much.”

“Perhaps it is for the best if we all forget that the ticket even existed,” Kirumi suggests as she clasps her hands down by her waist. “What’s done is done. Even though the ticket no longer exists we should be grateful that nothing seriously bad happened because of it.”

“That’s right!” Tenko agrees before pouting. “But imagine for one second if we did ask for all of the men in the world to disappear. That would’ve been so cool!”

“Ahaha, whatever you say, Chabashira,” Kaede laughs nervously.

At least no one seems too upset about the ticket. However, I can’t help but feel dirty. I’m letting everyone believe in a lie. Is lying truly okay?

Kaede's first task is to of course talk to Rantaro and discuss things with him. Thinking about him makes her feel confused. On one hand she understands why he used the ticket. However, she doesn't understand why he's okay with letting the group think Angie is the liar. Kaede feels uncomfortable about letting Angie potentially take the fall.

Her tablet says that he's inside his bedroom so Kaede heads there after breakfast. She raises a hand to knock on the door but pauses when she can hear...arguing? Kaede hesitates before pressing an ear against the door. She can feel guilty later.

"Is there a particular reason you've asked for me?"

"You know why I want to talk to you."

Monokuma? Why does Rantaro want to talk to him?

Monokuma laughs lowly. "Is this about the ticket, Amami? Don't tell me you're disappointed? You've helped the group out, you know? I don't see why you're so upset!"

"You know why I'm upset," Rantaro says. "I couldn't care less that Shirogane is actually an assassin. You know I wanted the mastermind's identity exposed!"

"But of course I knew that!" Monokuma sounds way too smug. "You seriously didn't think I'd let their identity be known so early into the game though, did you? I understand that the game hasn't been perfect but I wasn't about to completely ruin it by outing my partner in crime!"

"You said the ticket could be used for anything," Rantaro snaps. It's the angriest Kaede has ever heard him. "And I asked-"

"I clearly said that the ticket could be used for *almost* anything," Monokuma corrects him. "Even you must understand how game changing it would be for the villain to be exposed so early on. It would be super boring! Besides, you were the one who agreed on the request to be for whoever had been hiding their identity to reveal themselves. And that's what happened!"

"You knew Shirogane had been lying the entire time yet let me make the request," Rantaro hisses. "You knew it was going to be a waste!"

"I wouldn't call it a waste," Monokuma responds. "I should actually be thanking you for granting me a way to expose her. She was getting way too good at pretending to be someone else and I doubt any of you idiots would've noticed. The only person who would've eventually cottoned on, well, isn't here anymore."

There's a pause before Rantaro speaks again. "You still tricked me. This isn't fair and you know it. At least give everyone else another ticket so-"

"Woah, woah, woah! You can't expect me to clean up your mistakes!" Monokuma cries. "Listen mister, you were the one who made the request. End of story! It's just tragically unfortunate that someone else had been lying about their identity the entire time and the request only...required one person to expose themselves."

"...are you saying that if I asked everyone who had been lying about their identities to reveal themselves then..." Rantaro goes quiet.

"I mean, I would've forced you to reveal to everyone your talent too," Monokuma says. "After all,

you know who you are, don't you?"

"Even if I do know, I still don't understand why I have my Ultimate title. You know that."

"And the only way of you finding out has been completely destroyed along with the top floor of the academy," Monokuma says and Kaede can hear the smirk in his voice. "What a waste!"

"Wait, you're saying that-"

"Like I'm going to let you find the hint now!" Monokuma laughs. "You've wasted that opportunity along with the ticket. If only you hadn't been so selfish and paranoid about keeping your own identity safe then maybe everyone would've been informed about the identity of the mastermind. Better yet, people would know that there's even a mastermind to look out for!"

"You know why I haven't told many people about there being a mastermind," Rantaro counters. "No one would be able to trust each other-"

"That's what you think," Monokuma says. "Maybe not everyone is as paranoid as you."

"I'm not paranoid!"

"Whatever you say," Monokuma gleefully responds.

Kaede reacts a little too late when the door suddenly swings open. Monokuma looks pleased to see Kaede jump away from the door guiltily and walks past her wordlessly, leaving Kaede to pretend her face hasn't gone completely red as Rantaro gawks at her before sighing. He gestures for her to come into his room and she does, closing the door behind her.

"Hey..." Kaede awkwardly clasps her hands behind her back. "I'm, um, sorry for listening in but I didn't exactly want to interrupt you both."

She's expecting him to be at least irritated or scold her for listening in. However, Rantaro simply sighs and shakes his head. "It's fine. There's no point getting annoyed because Monokuma is right."

"Right about what?" Kaede frowns. "He was being really cruel to you. He had no right to say any of that stuff to you!"

"Of course he did because I've just made things worse for everyone," Rantaro says. "I wasted the ticket and didn't speak up when they decided to blame Angie."

"Hey, I didn't say anything either," Kaede quickly adds. "So don't feel guilty about that."

"Why didn't you say anything anyway?" Rantaro asks. "I shouldn't have even expected you to lie for me. It's just, I was still so frustrated about how Shirogane got exposed instead that I couldn't even bring myself to argue much. I just wanted everyone to stop talking about it."

"Truthfully I didn't want to lie," Kaede says softly. "But you looked so upset that I didn't want to make things worse for you by saying you were the one who used the ticket. I know you were only trying to help everyone."

"Like I helped much," Rantaro huffs.

"I mean, you did manage to highlight a threat, intentionally or not," Kaede says. "We wouldn't have ever known Shirogane had been lying if it hadn't been for you."

“But she wasn’t the person I was after,” Rantaro says. “I wanted to expose the mastermind, not her.”

“We both still have plenty of opportunities to get the mastermind,” Kaede tells him before pumping her fists. “Just because this was a failure doesn’t mean our next attempt will be!”

“Huh?” Rantaro tilts his head to the side. “Are you saying that you want to work together? I don’t know about that-”

“Hey, I know you’re scared!” Kaede smiles as she grabs his hand. “I am too! However, we can’t let one setback stop us from still trying. I’m just as disappointed as you that the mastermind wasn’t exposed but they unfortunately had an advantage over us! Monokuma clearly rigged the ticket so the mastermind would be kept safe. Maybe it was foolish of us both to think that we could stop the game so easily.”

Rantaro bites his lip before letting out a breath. “I should’ve waited until the morning to talk things through with you about the ticket. Maybe you would’ve realised that Monokuma had rigged the ticket and things wouldn’t be such a mess right now.”

Kaede shakes her head as she gives him a self deprecating smile. “I doubt I would’ve realised the ticket was rigged regardless if I was there or not. I know you must feel really frustrated right now but there’s not much we can do about it now. All we can do is move on and clean up the mess...you kinda made.”

“You don’t have to word it so nicely,” Rantaro says. “I know I’ve messed up. It’s just...I guess I’m scared to tell the truth to everyone. I haven’t even told you the entire truth either about some things and...”

“If you don’t want to tell me what you really know then I guess I can’t force you,” Kaede tells him. “But I’d like to think you’d be able to trust me enough one day so you can. Maybe it won’t be right now but hopefully soon.”

“How are you so patient?” Rantaro asks.

“Oh, I wouldn’t say I’m patient,” Kaede admits as her cheeks flush. “I guess I just don’t like it when other people are upset. I like to try my best to look after people, you know?”

“I guess,” Rantaro says before grimacing. “I’m still going to have to tell everyone that Angie isn’t actually the liar. It’s just, I don’t know what to actually tell them either. I can’t just expect them to trust me too...”

“We’ll figure something out together,” Kaede promises. “Actually, I have something to tell you since it’s only the two of us here and I think you’re the only person I can trust enough right now with this.”

“Oh?” Rantaro raises an eyebrow. “What’s up?”

“It’s about when Ouma died,” Kaede says as she reaches under her vest to pull on the orange fabric around her neck. She pulls the bedroom key out and holds it in her hand. “When Ouma was dying he pushed this fabric and key into my hand. I think he wanted me to have it, I’m not sure but...”

“He gave you his bedroom key...” Rantaro carefully inspects the key, making sure not to tug on it too hard. “Have you been in his room yet?”

“Yeah, a couple of times actually,” Kaede admits. “It’s...really overwhelming.”

"I'd be surprised if you didn't feel overwhelmed," Rantaro says. "After all, you were there when he..."

"Oh, I didn't mean it like that," Kaede says quietly. "It's more so...it's so full of stuff. Evidence."

"Huh? What do you mean by that?" Rantaro asks.

Kaede hesitates before heading towards the door. "It's probably better if I just showed you his room instead. Come on, let's go before someone spots us."

She doesn't give him much of a choice as she leaves the room before he can say anything, fiddling with the key around her neck as she finds Kokichi's bedroom door and slides the key inside. She can hear Rantaro following her and the sound of him locking his own bedroom door.

Kokichi's room is just as she left it. Messy.

"Oh wow, you weren't lying when you said his room felt overwhelming," Rantaro says as he steps inside, closing the door behind him.

"It's just so full," Kaede says as she sits down on his bed. "I mean, just look at everything! I don't even know how he managed to even sleep in here for a single night, let alone several. I can barely fit on the bed as it is."

"How'd he even manage to get all this stuff in his room anyway?" Rantaro ponders out loud as he looks around, eyes finally stopping on the whiteboard. "Oh, what's this? Why does it have everyone's pictures on it?"

Kaede swallows before responding. "Maybe you should take a closer look at the board. It'll explain the whiteboard that's outside and why Ouma put us into those different groups a couple of days ago."

Rantaro shoots her a curious look before standing in front of the whiteboard with his arms crossed. Kaede can hear him mutter to himself as he connects the dots one by one. "This looks like...he's been taking notes of murders."

"That's right," Kaede agrees as she clasps her hands together tightly. "Amami, that whiteboard is just one piece of evidence that we've all been here before. T-There's even more proof too. When Ouma said he didn't think it was our first time here I think he was right."

Rantaro pulls a face as his eyes linger on his own photograph next to Kaede's. "But if this board is right then..."

"Yeah, I tried to kill you the previous time we were here," Kaede spits out, desperately trying to ignore the growing lump in her throat. "Amami, I'm so sorry-"

"Don't," Rantaro instantly says. His expression softens when he realises Kaede is wearing a look of horror. "I'm not mad at you, ah, perhaps I shouldn't have been so abrupt. I just don't want you to feel guilty over something neither of us can remember. Neither of us don't know what happened the last time we were here."

"That doesn't change the fact I still tried to kill you," Kaede objects. "At least...at least let me apologise for the actions of the previous me. I don't know why I...she tried to kill you but..."

"I'm sure she had a reason," Rantaro reassures her. "Don't beat yourself up over this. Like I said, there's no point in feeling guilty over something either of us can't remember. For all we both know,

I could've given you a reason to-"

"No, that's not right," Kaede says. She reaches over to the desk and pictures up the pile of photographs. "These photographs are...I think they show the moments before you were almost killed."

The first time she looked at them it didn't click. However, now that she thinks about it, Kaede realises how the first murder attempt probably went down.

Despite everything, when she had gone to the warehouse with Tsumugi she had picked up a shot put ball. She kept it in her backpack and planned to roll it down the vent and kill the mastermind. That must've happened last time too, the last time she and everyone else was here. No one must've stopped her last time and she probably planned a little more ahead, creating some sort of trap to lure the mastermind forward.

Only, the trap lured Rantaro forward. Kaede grimaces as Rantaro looks down at the photograph of himself reaching out towards a camera.

The only logical solution is that Kaede set up that stupid trap in the library to try and kill the mastermind. It makes the most sense to her because, because, because...she tried to do the very exact same thing this time too. It was only because Kokichi intervened that she didn't and it was only Kokichi who had the evidence of knowing Kaede would try and pull a stunt like that.

(And Rantaro had been down in the library this time too. That's right, when Kaede had been frantically trying to find who had been poisoned he had been down there. If Kaede had rolled the shot put ball this time too then she would've been repeating her previous mistake of almost killing-)

"You tried to kill the mastermind the last time we were here?"

"Huh?" Kaede blinks as she's dragged from her thoughts. "O-Oh...I guess so?"

Rantaro looks pale as he places the photographs back down on the desk. "...it's sort of weird seeing photographs like that, you know? They kind of gave me a headache but...a really painful one right at the back of my head."

"I'm sorry," Kaede instantly apologises. "I didn't-"

"Why are you apologising? It's not like you're the one who caused the headache," Rantaro says. "Maybe I'm just feeling a little stressed at the moment."

"Probably because I'm showing you so much stuff at once," Kaede says. "Sorry for not warning you more. I just, well, thought you should see all this. I've been meaning to find someone to trust with what's in this room and I guess it's only fair that you're the first person I show this room to. After all, you trusted both me and Ouma down in the library. Think of this as payback for that."

"I wasn't expecting any sort of payback," Rantaro tells her. "But I really do appreciate it, Akamatsu. Maybe there's even something in here that'll help us get out of here!"

"Perhaps," Kaede echoes quietly.

"You're still not upset about earlier, are you?" Rantaro suddenly asks as he leans forward. "Listen, we don't know what really happened last time we were here and what caused you to do what you did. Just, believe me when I say I don't blame you. You made a mistake, just like how I did. You can't start moping around when I'm not allowed to."

“Lying is one thing but murder-”

“If you murdered me then would I be here right now?” Rantaro asks as he stretches his hands out.
“Hmm, yep, I’m definitely alive.”

“But-”

“No excuses,” Rantaro says. “You’re allowed to make mistakes sometimes, you know? No one here is perfect, Akamatsu.”

I brought him in here to cheer him up yet it seems that he’s the one cheering me up instead. I’m not doing a very good job of making sure everyone is okay, huh? I was supposed to be comforting him, not the other way around!

“You’re right,” Kaede says. “Sorry, I’m just...still overwhelmed by a lot of things lately. This room made me realise a lot of things and I’ve already promised myself I would get a grip already.”

“You should try and be nicer to yourself,” Rantaro tells her. “You’re trying and that’s all that matters.”

Kaede beams as she nods.

I know there’s a huge mess to sort out later but for now I’m glad things are okay. I should probably show him the secret passageway in the girl’s bathroom soon too, that is if it’s still open. At least then that’ll keep him away from the door in the library.

(That way, there’s no way a shot put ball ever caves in his skull again.)

During the evening Kaede bumps into Angie, who is just about to leave the academy. The artist had made herself scarce the entire day. Kaede isn’t sure if it’s because she’s been hiding from people or too angry to talk.

However, when Kaede looks at her face she spots that Angie is looking strangely happy. The artist even gives Kaede a small wave.

“Yoo hoo, Kaede!” Angie bobs her head from side to side. “You’re looking well but don’t you think it might be a little dangerous walking around on your own? Especially now that there’s an assassin at our school!”

“But you’re walking alone too,” Kaede points out.

“No, no! Angie has her God watching over her! He’ll make sure that Angie is safe,” Angie insists before tilting her head. “So, um, does Kaede know where some people are? Angie has something super important to ask them.”

“Something important?” Kaede asks curiously. “Did something happen?”

“Angie has decided now is the best time to start up her student council,” Angie reveals as she squishes her hands to her cheeks. “So Angie has been talking to her God all day to figure out who the best people are to join!”

“You want to set up a student council? Why?” Kaede asks in confusion. “I don’t think we need one in a place like this.”

“Don’t be silly, of course we need one!” Angie insists. “We need a group of people to make sure everyone stays safe! Which is why Angie needs to hurry and start up the council sooner than later. So Angie needs you to tell her where some people are, like, right now!”

Kaede hesitates as she puts a hand to her hip. “Angie, um, think of it from my perspective. You’re demanding to know where some people are. Wouldn’t you be worried if you were me?”

“Huh? But Kaede should know that Angie isn’t going to hurt anyone!” Angie cries, clearly distraught that Kaede would think otherwise. “Only Shirogane is a real threat here! Which is why we need the council! If Kaede doesn’t want to help then Angie really needs to get going so-”

“Who are you looking for?” Kaede quickly asks before Angie can leave. “S-So I can tell them that you’re looking for them!” Also to warn them that Angie is clearly up to something.

Angie pauses before smiling. “Angie is looking for Rantaro and Tenko for now. The council may expand after some discussion but Angie really wants those two.”

“Those two seem like a random choice,” Kaede admits. “Why them in particular?”

“Because Angie at least knows they’re like, super duper safe!” Angie admits. “Because, because, Monokuma showed us that whiteboard when he got here of who is dangerous and who isn’t, right? Those two along with Angie are the only people left who aren’t considered dangerous so Angie thinks those two would be the best choices for her council!”

Kaede pretends it doesn’t feel like she’s been punched in the gut. “I-I see!”

“Oh Kaede, Angie can tell you’re upset,” Angie says. “But can she blame Angie for being careful right now? She’s not completely sure who she can trust at the moment ever since Shirogane lied to the group but surely Kaede understands, yes?”

“I-I do in a way,” Kaede says. “But Angie, are you sure making a council is the best idea? Not everyone might want one and I don’t really understand why you’re even making one in the first place.”

“So Angie can look after the school!” Angie says and Kaede can sense a spark of impatience in her voice. “The council will implement rules that everyone will follow! Such as, no walking around on your own or no making food in the kitchen without supervision.”

Kaede opens her mouth to ask why Angie would add in such a strange rule before her eyes open in realisation. Ah, that’s right. Kokichi died because he ate something that had been poisoned. Kaede feels her facial features soften.

Angie’s council is starting to make sense actually. She doesn’t want to cause trouble but instead help people in her own way. However, I’m not so sure how popular her council will be. After all, we’re already being forced to follow Monokuma’s rules. I don’t think everyone will want to follow her rules too and from the sound of them, they’re going to be super strict.

“Why don’t you want to ask Hoshi to join your council then?” Kaede asks. “He’s a part of the safe group too, right?”

“Yeah, but, um, Ryoma is like, a murderer?” Angie responds as if Kaede said something extremely stupid. “At least Ryoma didn’t hide the fact that he’s a bad person so Angie can respect him for that. Shirogane totally hid the fact she’s a bad person so like, Angie can’t actually forgive her. At all.”

“That’s...” Kaede swallows. “That’s fair.”

“Oh!” Angie looks surprised before shaking her head with a smile. “Angie didn’t think Kaede would agree so quickly! Maybe Angie should reconsider and ask Kaede to join her council too? Maybe later though, Angie really, reeeally wants Tenko and Rantaro to join first!”

“Well I do know where Amami is so do you want me to tell him to find you?” Kaede asks.

“That’s a divine idea!” Angie agrees with a laugh. “That means Angie just has to find Tenko! Angie is sure that God will help her so hooray! Oh, oh! Tell Rantaro to meet Angie in her art room! Angie is going straight up there when she finds Tenko. Just tell him to knock on the door, um, three times so Angie knows it’s him, okay?”

Angie skips away before Kaede can stop her. The pianist sighs and turns around. Back to Kokichi’s room she goes. She left to take a break too.

But informing Rantaro about Angie’s council is probably more important than taking a break right now. Maybe I should offer to go with him. It’s not like I don’t trust Angie but I do want to know what is going on. Also, I’m not sure if things are going to get awkward between Rantaro and Angie either. I don’t think anyone has confronted Angie yet but I think things are going to get confusing if someone does. Hopefully Tenko doesn’t say anything...

Kaede startles when she reaches the dormitories. She’s about to open the door when it opens itself. She takes a step back when Kaito steps outside, dragging Tsumugi along with him. Kaede notices that Tsumugi has ditched the two red scrunchies on her wrists from earlier.

“Oh, hey!” Kaito looks excited. “Kaede, you’ll join us both for training, right?”

“Huh?!”

Kaito doesn’t even let her answer. “It took most of the day but I’ve finally managed to convince Maki out of her room!”

“I-I told you to stop calling me that!” Tsumugi wails as she ducks her head down, her hair curtaining her face. “I’ve already told you how it makes my skin crawl!”

“But you shouldn’t have to hide who you are!” Kaito insists as he wraps an arm around both Kaede and Tsumugi’s shoulders and walks them away from the dormitories. “Isn’t that right, Kaede? Tell her that you’re not mad or anything about her lying! No one is!”

“Kaede?” Kaede blurts out before clearing her throat. “Um...”

“She’s hesitating,” Tsumugi points out as she tries to make a very obvious and very desperate escape. “Because she’s scared of me like I’ve been trying to tell you! I shouldn’t be around people anymore, Momota. I appreciate what you’re trying to do but-”

“Don’t run away!” Kaito pulls her back firmly but gently. “C’mon, Maki. Just one training session with me and my sidekick? I promise you she’s not scared of you at all! Kaede’s worries are my worries so if I’m not scared of you then she totally isn’t either!”

“That plainly doesn’t make any sense,” Tsumugi mutters. “Have you seen her face?”

“What do you mean?”

Kaede grimaces as Kaito stares at her. “Momota, I don’t think we’re on the same wavelength right

now....”

“Wait, you’re actually scared of her?” Kaito asks in surprise, letting his arms slump down to his sides. “But why? She’s one of us!”

“It’s...complicated,” Kaede admits. Truth be told, she hasn’t really been thinking about Tsumugi at all today. Should she be scared of her? Probably. Should she be angry that she’s been lying all this time? Probably. Would she feel completely two faced if she were to call out Tsumugi? Of course.

Is she hurt that Tsumugi didn’t trust her enough to tell her about her true identity? Yeah, she really is now that she thinks about it.

“Do you want to talk things through together?” Kaito asks. “Because-”

“I appreciate that you’ve been trying all day but...” Tsumugi smiles sadly. “I don’t think anyone else is ready to accept me yet, Momota. And it’s plainly unfair to expect people to like me too. Besides, I’m used to just being ignored so...if you would both excuse me.”

Tsumugi heads back inside and Kaede can feel some sort of ache in her chest. It’s uncomfortable and it makes her want to run after Tsumugi and tell her that everything is going to be okay. Instead, Kaede stands outside uselessly as Kaito scratches his head, clearly baffled.

“Kinda thought you would back me up there,” Kaito admits quietly. “Are you actually scared of her?”

“No, not scared,” Kaede answers as she watches Tsumugi go into her room. “Just upset that she’s been lying about something so important for so long...”

“You’re hesitating,” Kaito points out. “C’mon! Out with it. You clearly have something you want to say!”

“It’s something...private,” Kaede admits as she clutches onto her arm. “But say...hypothetically speaking, what would you do if you had two people who lied to you and only one of them told you the truth. However, that same person did something that unintentionally did something to hurt the person who didn’t tell you the truth but forced a secret of theirs to come out. You’ve already forgiven the person who lied but you haven’t really thought about the other person...”

“Hmm...” Kaito rubs his chin before glancing up at the sky that’s decorated with stars. “That’s quite the problem. I guess if it was me I’d choose to believe in them both, you know? It’s not like you actually know what they’ve both been through and why one is more open than the other. What matters is how you handle things.”

“So you’d forgive them both?” Kaede asks. “But...”

“I mean, it’s your responsibility as a friend to look after them both!” Kaito says. “What if you don’t know the full picture behind why they’ve been lying and why one told you the truth and one didn’t? It’s up to you to believe in them! Sometimes people just need one person to believe in them to make them feel better!”

“And how do you know someone is worth believing in?” Kaede asks.

“Oh, you’ll know,” Kaito reassures her before winking. “Sleep on it and when you’re ready, talk to Maki. I think she really needs a friend right now.”

“How did you...” Kaede sighs before smiling. “Maybe you’re right. I just...”

“Hey, it’s like I said, your worries are my worries and to be honest I really don’t think Maki is a bad person at all,” Kaito says. “It’s just a shame someone outed her before she was ready to tell everyone.”

“Do you think she would’ve told us if...you know?”

“I don’t know,” Kaito admits. “What’s done is done, I suppose. I am kind of annoyed that someone outed her without even hesitating. How did someone find out about her anyway?”

“I’m not sure,” Kaede says. “I, um, actually have to do something right now. Angie wanted to talk to Amami about something so I need to go and tell him.”

“Why didn’t you say so earlier?” Kaito asks. “Go on then! I guess I’ll be training on my own tonight!”

“D-Don’t make me feel guilty,” Kaede responds before dashing off.

She tells Rantaro about Angie and he goes to find her, promising Kaede he’ll tell her what happens in the morning. Kaede ends up going to bed earlier than expected, suddenly exhausted after dealing with so much.

Tenko is oddly quiet during their morning session of Neo-Aikido. It’s only six in the morning and the only people who are awake are Kaede, Tenko and Kirumi. The latter is currently in the kitchen preparing breakfast.

Kaede wipes her brow with her sleeve as she finishes her warm up exercises, feeling sweaty but rather refreshed and prepared for Tenko’s instructions. She takes a sip from her water bottle as she waits for Tenko to finish up her own warm ups.

Strange...usually Tenko is done before me. Is something bothering her?

“Is everything okay, Chabashira?”

“Ack!” Tenko startles as she almost topples over. Thankfully she manages to keep her balance. “Y-You scared me!”

“Sorry!” Kaede smiles hesitantly. “It’s just, um, you seem less enthusiastic this morning. Did something happen?”

“Well...” Tenko seems to hesitate before groaning loudly, covering her face with her hands.

“Tenko sort of agreed to do something she didn’t really agree with herself last night. Did you know Angie’s setting up a student council?”

“Oh, ah, yeah,” Kaede answers. “She was talking to me about it last night.”

“So you already knew what she was up to?” Tenko pauses. “N-Not that Tenko is blaming you or anything! It’s just, um, Tenko agreed to join her council and she’s not sure if she’s actually made the right choice.”

“You joined?” Kaede asks in surprise. “What convinced you to?”

“Well, Tenko had this feeling that it was the right thing to do,” Tenko admits. “Angie started to go on about her God and that sort of made Tenko uncomfortable since she doesn’t actually believe in

him but, well, it wasn't as if Tenko could let Amami join her on his own either."

"Amami joined too?!" Kaede blinks. "Why?"

"Tenko doesn't know! He just sort of agreed straight away!" Tenko reveals as she waves her hands around. "He said that it's probably a good thing to make sure no one else gets hurt again but he'd like to negotiate with the rules a little. Angie seemed fine with that but, well, Tenko sort of senses something is a little off. Like, Tenko knows Amami isn't a bad person but he agreed way too easily and he just doesn't seem like the type of person to join a council so easily."

Did he join it out of guilt perhaps? He knows that if he doesn't speak up then Angie is going to take the fall for his mistake really soon.

"So you joined to look after him?" Kaede asks.

Tenko crosses her arms. "Well, after flipping him the other day Tenko knows he doesn't trust so easily so she was really confused why he'd join straight away. Ah, this is going to sound really strange but will Akamatsu hear Tenko out?"

"Sure?" Kaede raises an eyebrow. "What's up?"

"Well...it's not like Tenko has any problems with Angie but last night she just had this clear image of her...brainwashing people to join her council? T-Tenko knows it's super weird and she's probably overthinking things but she can't help but think Angie's council is only going to cause problems! So if Tenko joins the council then at least she can keep an eye on Angie and anyone else who joins!"

"Do you really think Angie's council is going to cause trouble?" Kaede asks, her brow creasing in worry. "I just can't imagine Angie trying to cause problems on purpose."

"Tenko agrees! It's just, maybe Angie just thinks differently compared to the rest of us," Tenko says. "Tenko also kind of feels a little bad for her because soon people are going to be asking her why she used the ticket and Tenko thinks that's going to really hurt her feelings so..."

"Did someone say they were going to confront her?" Kaede asks. Her knees feel weak.

"Um..." Tenko tilts her head to the side. "Tenko thinks she remembers Shinguji mentioning it yesterday. But, um, as much as Tenko doesn't want to hurt Angie's feelings, she does need to own up to what she's done. That ticket could've been used for something so much better! A-And Shirogane didn't need to be exposed like that. Tenko understands that it's probably for the best that we know about her talent but..."

"It wasn't fair that she was exposed so abruptly," Kaede finishes with a sad sigh.

Tenko nervously presses her fingers together as she says, "Akamatsu? You were really close to her when we first got here, right? What do you think about all of this? About her...lying for so long? Tenko feels torn."

"I don't really know how to feel either," Kaede admits. "On one hand I'm upset that she has been lying but on the other hand..."

"She just wanted to be everyone's friend," Tenko says. "If only she'd let Tenko flip her! Then Tenko could prove that she's a good person just like the rest of us!"

"Can assassins be good people though?" Kaede finds herself saying, unable to stop herself in time.

She slaps her hands over her mouth when Tenko gives her an unreadable look. “M-Maybe I don’t have the right to judge, especially after being put on the dangerous list the other day but...assassins are murderers, right? They kill with no mercy! Of course I’m going to be reluctant to want to trust her again!”

“Tenko noticed that Momota had no problem trusting her right away,” Tenko points out. “Tenko can’t tell if he’s an idiot or just has a really big heart. Tenko thinks it’s probably just the first option.”

“I spoke with him last night,” Kaede admits. “I think he really wants me to be friends with her again. I just, I don’t get how he’s able to believe in her so easily. A small part of me wants to be able to believe in her, especially since she was outed without a choice!”

“Tenko wonders how Angie found out about Shirogane anyway,” Tenko murmurs. “We never did figure that out.”

Kaede swallows. That’s a whole other mess that needs sorting out real soon too. She just, well, she doesn’t know what to do because no matter what, someone is going to get hurt in the end.

The pianist lets out a yelp as Tenko is suddenly behind her and once again, the world twists as Tenko lets out a yell and flips her onto the floor. She groans as she sits up, rolling her shoulders.

“What was that for?!” Kaede whines. “I thought you already-”

“Tenko could tell by the look on Akamatsu’s face that something is bothering her so Tenko decided to flip her again to figure out how to help!” Tenko explains. “Does Akamatsu remember what Tenko told her last time? That she needs to open up more?”

“I have-”

“Tenko knows,” Tenko cuts in and Kaede closes her mouth. “Tenko can tell that Akamatsu’s shoulders feel a lot lighter, like a heavy burden has been lifted. Akamatsu must’ve found someone to confide in, right?”

“I...I think so, yeah,” Kaede agrees as she thinks back to yesterday, how she and Rantaro spent the day going through Kokichi’s room together. “But-”

“Tenko is so happy that Akamatsu found someone to help her!” Tenko squeals as she suddenly pulls Kaede in for a hug. She misses how Tenko’s face falls ever so slightly as the aikido master presses her face into Kaede’s shoulder. “But Tenko also sensed that Akamatsu has found herself with another problem that she can’t even open up to her new friend about. Akamatsu’s heart is still in turmoil...”

“How did you-”

“If Akamatsu is still unable to open up to her new friend then maybe she should try and open up to Tenko,” Tenko offers. “Tenko only wants what is best for everyone here, especially the girls! Tenko can’t bear the thought of Akamatsu having to carry such heavy burdens alone.”

“I-It’s not that bad,” Kaede says before letting out a shaky breath. “I just, I really don’t know what to do because there’s a problem that’s going to end up with something being hurt in the end no matter what.”

“Like, injured or emotionally hurt?” Tenko asks, pulling herself away from the hug to grab Kaede’s shoulders.

Kaede swallows. "Emotionally, I think. B-But you shouldn't concern yourself-"

"Of course Tenko should!" Tenko retorts. "Didn't we all promise to be more open to each other after what happened to Ouma? If Akamatsu thinks that someone is going to be hurt then we need to do something about it-"

"It's not as easy as that!" Kaede insists. "Someone is going to get hurt no matter what, Chabashira! A-And I'm the only person who can put a stop to it but I can't! Not without hurting someone."

Tenko pulls a face as she drums her fingers against Kaede's shoulders, clearly deep in thought. "Can...can Akamatsu trust Tenko enough to tell her what's going on? Tenko swears she won't tell anyone else about Akamatsu's problem but she can't do anything if she doesn't know what's going on."

...is trusting Tenko the right thing to do? She's been nothing but supportive ever since we got here. What right do I have to cause her problems? A-And telling her what's wrong will mean telling her about Rantaro and I don't think he wants many people knowing that he knows a lot more than he's letting on.

"Akamatsu, please," Tenko says as she carefully weaves her fingers with Kaede's own, holding their hands tightly together. "Tenko can sense without even flipping you that you're struggling. If Akamatsu truly doesn't want to tell Tenko what's wrong then that's fine but Tenko promises that all she wants is for Akamatsu to be happy."

"...I..." Kaede takes a deep breath. Tenko squeezes her hand softly. "I know who actually used the ticket. I-It wasn't Angie."

Tenko is quiet and Kaede feels like she's made a mistake. Why did she say that? Now Tenko has to deal with the fact-

"Was it Akamatsu's new friend who did?" Tenko asks carefully.

Kaede nods slowly, feeling a mixture of nausea and strangely enough, relief, churn in her stomach. "They...they weren't even going after Shirogane either. Monokuma tricked them into asking for something that would cause Shirogane to be exposed."

"So Shirogane wasn't even supposed to be exposed," Tenko mumbles. "And does Akamatsu feel guilty about that?"

"Yeah, I do," Kaede agrees, wiping her eyes that are starting to sting. "Because Shirogane was, no, she is still my friend. I'm just, I guess I'm just conflicted because I'm upset she's lied to me but I feel like the world's biggest hypocrite since I'm also lying about something to protect my friend."

"Is Akamatsu's friend forcing her to lie for them?" Tenko asks as her eyes narrow. "Because that's not okay-"

"No, no, they're not forcing me at all," Kaede interjects quickly. "I understand why they haven't spoken up about the whole ticket situation too. That's something that I can't tell you but I promise that they're not a bad person, they just made a mistake. It's just, everyone is going to confront Angie today and that's not fair! But if my friend gets exposed then they're going to get really hurt and I...I don't want that. I owe it to them to keep them safe, especially since the last time we were here..."

"Akamatsu, you're not making much sense," Tenko admits. "What do you mean by that?"

"It's nothing, probably," Kaede says. "Sorry! You don't need to worry about all of this-"

"Tenko doesn't mind, she was the one who asked you to tell her," Tenko reminds her. "But Tenko thinks she understands why you feel so conflicted now. Tenko would probably feel the same way too."

"I just don't want anyone to get hurt," Kaede says. "I just feel even worse knowing the actual truth but not telling anyone else."

"Your friend must mean a lot to you if you're willing to go this far to make sure they're okay," Tenko points out. "In a way, Tenko is glad Akamatsu has found someone she can really trust."

Trust? Is that the right word? Maybe. After all, I did trust Rantaro with Kokichi's bedroom. Then again...is the only reason I'm trusting him so much is out of guilt? Because I tried to kill him the last time we were here? No, that's wrong! I trust him because he trusts me! Because he trusted me and Kokichi with the knowledge that there's a secret door. He didn't have to tell me about that but he did! A-And he forgave me so quickly too even after seeing the whiteboard in Kokichi's room.

"I just hate being in this position," Kaede groans as she runs a hand down her face. "Everyone is going to meet up for breakfast soon and no doubt they're going to start asking questions then."

Tenko's eyes suddenly light up. "Then we'll just have to make sure breakfast doesn't happen!"

"Huh?!"

"Tenko does think that hiding the truth for too long is probably going to cause problems but if breakfast doesn't happen then everyone won't meet up and confront Angie!" Tenko explains.

"That'll give you a little extra time to talk to your friend and decide what to do!"

"A little more time would be helpful," Kaede agrees before pulling a face. "But I'd feel a little bad for Tojo if we ruin breakfast."

"We're not going to ruin breakfast," Tenko reassures her. "Just, maybe, hide the food for a while? Breakfast can't happen if there's no food to eat!"

Tenko seems so excited by the idea that Kaede doesn't even try to stop her. A small part of her feels guilty for unloading all of her problems onto Tenko but a bigger part of her is happy that she has Tenko to lean on for support now, that Tenko trusts her enough to help.

Maybe...maybe opening up and trusting people isn't that bad after all. I thought opening up to others would cause problems for them in the long run but I don't think that's right anymore. Thank you, Tenko.

Tenko ends up dashing around the school with a trolley containing all the food for breakfast whilst Kirumi chases after her. Kaede can't help but feel bad for both of them, especially Kirumi since the maid clearly doesn't know what's going on and why Tenko decided to suddenly steal everyone's breakfast.

Kaede stands at the dining room door, turning away people when they turn up for breakfast.

"I can just make my own breakfast if Tojo isn't up to it," Ryoma points out, plucking the candy cigarette from his mouth between his fingers.

“That’s not a good idea,” Kaede says as a fake smile stretches on her face. “Um, all the food is gone.”

“All of it?” Ryoma tugs on his hat. “Are you sure?”

“Yep! So, ah, Tojo is currently asking Monokuma for some more!”

“Well what are we supposed to do in the meantime?” Korekiyo asks. “Additionally, I’m very hungry so-”

“I-I won some sweets from the Monokuma machine the other day! I can hand those out in just a moment if you would like?” Kaede suggests. At best she has a handful of sweets in her backpack from the odd couple of times she’s used the machine. She doubts she has enough for everyone.

Korekiyo pauses before shaking his head. “No, I think I’d rather wait for Tojo to make breakfast.”

“Shouldn’t we just wait in the dining room?” Kiiibo asks. “That would certainly be more convenient-”

“No!” Kaede blurts out. “Y-You guys just, um, do whatever you usually do during the day! I’ll come and get you all when breakfast is ready!”

“You’re acting a bit odd,” Kiiibo admits. “Are you okay?”

“Me? Oh, yeah, I’m fine!” Kaede answers. “Just, ah, a little disappointed that I have to wait for breakfast! I worked up quite the appetite after training with Chabashira this morning so…”

“Very well then,” Korekiyo thankfully takes the hint to leave. “I trust that you’ll gather everyone when Tojo is ready for us all.”

“Yep!” Kaede nods furiously, feeling relieved when Kiiibo and Korekiyo leave. Ryoma, however, continues to look up at her curiously. “Can I help you, Hoshi?”

Ryoma clearly isn’t as satisfied as the other two. “Are you sure you’re telling the truth, Akamatsu?”

“Huh?” Kaede blinks before letting out a nervous giggle. “Why would I have to lie-”

“I was in my lab earlier and saw Tojo chasing Chabashira around. Chabashira was clearly pushing a trolley of food around with her,” Ryoma says. “So forgive me for being a little bit suspicious.”

“Ah…” Kaede opens and closes her mouth. “That’s…”

Ryoma gives her a hard look before sighing. Kaede winces, preparing herself for a verbal smackdown. “I guess it makes sense why you’ve done all of this.”

“I-”

“You had Chabashira take the food so no one could eat it, right?” Ryoma says and Kaede nods numbly, feeling rather stupid that she’s been caught out so quickly. “I suppose if it was anyone else then I’d be a little more suspicious but the fact that it’s you who’s responsible for this, well, I guess I understand.”

“Huh?”

“I know finding Ouma how you did must’ve been hard,” Ryoma continues. “But I doubt all the

food in the school has been poisoned if that's what you're worried about."

He...he thinks I had Tenko take the food because I was worried it was poisoned? I guess I didn't even think about that. Even I know that there's a low chance the food is going to be poisoned again-

"The room with all the poison inside has been destroyed too, remember?" Ryoma reminds her. "So I don't think there's a way for the food to be tampered with now."

"You're right," Kaede says slowly. "I, um, guess I didn't think about that."

"You shouldn't worry so much," Ryoma tells her. "It's not only your responsibility to keep everyone safe. You do understand that, right?"

"I guess-"

"Sheesh, you've still got a ways to go, Akamatsu," Ryoma says before sighing. "I won't lie, I'm a little disappointed I'll have to wait for breakfast but I don't blame you or anything. Just, make sure everyone does get to eat today, okay? If you doubt everything all the time you're just going to drive yourself insane."

Kaede bites the inside of her mouth as she watches Ryoma leave. She can't help but feel disappointed in herself. The measures she's taking just to make everyone happy is starting to make others miserable. Is that okay?

Maybe everything is starting to crumble because I'm trying to control everything? Maybe if I just...let things happen instead of intervening then everything will turn out okay? But...

"Oh! Hiya, Kaede!"

Kaede sees Angie and Rantaro walk towards her and she allows the fakest smile she can muster to spread on her face. "Hello!"

"Um, is Kaede okay because she's looking super stressed!" Angie points out. "Kaede has no reason to worry anymore because Angie is ready to start up her student council now! Rantaro and Tenko both agreed to join which, like, made Angie super happy!"

"Chabashira told me this morning," Kaede admits as she crosses her arms. "Hey, so breakfast might be a while-"

"We figured," Rantaro says. "We saw Chabashira and Tojo running around upstairs."

"Ah..." Kaede pulls a face. "So you know breakfast is going to be delayed then..."

"Does Kaede know why Tenko took all the food?" Angie asks. "Because Angie is like, super confused!"

"Um..."

"Oh well! It doesn't really matter now, does it?" Angie continues. "Angie is holding a super important meeting later so Angie wanted to tell everyone about that! Does Kaede know when breakfast is actually going to be on? Angie wants to talk to everyone!"

"I don't think that's-"

Kaede catches Rantaro's eye and sees that he's...motioning her to stop? Stop what? Lying? The

pianist droops in confusion.

“I think what Akamatsu is saying is that breakfast is probably going to be soon, right?” Rantaro says.

“I guess?” Kaede says with a raised eyebrow.

Angie clasps her hands together happily. “Oh! So there’s simply going to be a small delay? That’s fine! Angie can deal with that! That gives Angie plenty of time to prepare herself for her speech anyway! So like, Angie is going to go to the art room now. Oh! Oh! Rantaro should totes tell Kaede about the student council! After some discussion last night we all decided that we should let as many people as possible join! That includes you, Kaede!”

“Me?” Kaede furrows her brow. “But I thought you said last night-”

“Angie has no time to stand around to chat! She has to prepare!” Angie tells her. “Byeonara!”

“That was kind of strange,” Kaede says as Angie dashes off, her yellow raincoat bouncing along with her excited movements. “I would’ve thought her of all people would’ve wanted to explain her student council.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it too much,” Rantaro tells her. “Actually, I’m glad she’s gone since I have something important to tell you-”

“Oh! So do I actually!” Kaede checks to make sure the hallway is empty. It is. “But how about you go first?”

“Well...” Rantaro rubs the back of his head. “I told Angie about the whole ticket incident, well, sort of.”

“What?!” Kaede can imagine her eyes bulging out of her head. “When?! Why? I didn’t think you’d actually...”

Rantaro seems slightly amused by her reaction before his face morphs into something more serious. “I guess the guilt of lying caught up to me, especially since Angie was being so...nice last night. Do you know how guilty you end up feeling when someone goes on about how their God trusts and believes in you? I guess it just sort of slipped out.”

“And? How did she react?” Kaede presses.

“She didn’t actually seem to care,” Rantaro reveals. “In fact, she didn’t even ask any questions about it. I was going to tell her that I was trying to expose someone else but instead she just, well, thanked me for revealing the truth about Shirogane. She didn’t even care that it was unintentional.”

“What? Really?” Kaede frowns. “She didn’t even care that you took the ticket?”

“She kept going on about how her God works in mysterious ways and how things work out for a reason,” Rantaro explains. “I mean, I should’ve tried harder to tell her that Shirogane being exposed was a mistake but she really didn’t care at all. I even told her that people thought she was the one who used the ticket to expose Shirogane.”

“And what did she say about that?”

“That she doesn’t care what people think,” Rantaro answers. “I tried to tell her that I’ll try and fix everything today but she told me not to even bother, which is kind of like, well, baffling? It’s

almost as if she wants people to think she was the reason Shirogane was exposed.”

“I don’t understand...” Kaede fiddles with the straps on her backpack to occupy herself. “I’ve been worrying about this for a while now yet she doesn’t even care!”

“You’ve been...worrying?” Rantaro sounds concerned. “But everything to do with the ticket isn’t your responsibility, it’s mine-”

“I get that now but, ah...” Kaede huffs. “I was so worried that you’d be worried about people questioning Angie about the whole ticket that I kinda, well, worked together with Chabashira to delay breakfast so we could plan something...”

Rantaro stares at her incredulously before he startles Kaede with a loud laugh. Her face goes red as she pouts.

“This isn’t funny! I was seriously worried about you!” Kaede tells him, desperately trying to keep her voice down.

“I-I’m not laughing at you! I promise!” Rantaro insists as she shakes his head. “It’s just, ah, it’s kind of ironic how things have worked out. You’ve been worrying about me all this time yet I already sort of fixed the problem you were worried about.”

“I mean, there’s still a chance that Angie might reveal that you used the ticket,” Kaede reminds him.

“I don’t think that’s likely,” Rantaro reassures her. “I know it’s wrong of me but Angie seems all too happy to say she was the one who used the ticket and if that keeps me out of trouble then...”

Kaede tuts as she crosses her arms, feeling like an overworked teacher. “It’s a little unfair of you just to let Angie take the fall.”

Rantaro shrugs helplessly. “I mean, she still could reveal that I took the ticket. If that happens then I’ll deal with the consequences then but for now, well, it’s not like it’s going to hurt anyone if we both decide to stay quiet, right?”

“You’re...really desperate to avoid talking to everyone, aren’t you?” Kaede realises. “I didn’t realise that you’re this, um, anxious.”

“It’s just with what I know...” Rantaro says, pulling a face. “I think maybe you’d understand if I...perhaps show you something.”

Kaede sees how his hand trembles as he pulls his tablet out from his pocket, his grip on it like a vice as he looks down the hallway a couple of times before pressing his tablet firmly into her hands.

“Don’t turn it on right now,” Rantaro says. “But when you’re alone I want you to read what’s on it. Privately. A-And make sure to keep the tablet safe. I’ll come to collect it later on.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep it safe,” Kaede promises as she hugs it to her chest. “Thank you for trusting me with this.”

Rantaro looks like he wants to snatch his tablet back but instead gives her a nod. “Well, um, I should’ve probably showed you what was on it earlier. It explains...quite a lot. Especially why I don’t want people asking me how I knew someone here had been lying. Just, make sure you don’t lose it, okay?”

"I one hundred percent promise I won't," Kaede reassures him.

"...thanks," Rantaro suddenly mumbles. "For trusting me with so much even when I haven't exactly given you a reason to."

"Well I guess some people are just worth believing in," Kaede says.

Rantaro pauses before grinning. "I think you've been spending too much time around Momota because I swear I've heard him say something like that before."

"W-Well!" Kaede pokes her tongue out at him. "I'm his sidekick, didn't you know?"

"Oh really? What does that mean?"

"I...actually have no clue," Kaede admits with a snort. "But it's been really, really nice having so many people believing in me lately. It makes me wonder how many friends I had last time we were here."

"I'm sure you had plenty of friends," Rantaro tells her. "But I'm guessing from evidence in Ouma's bedroom that maybe I didn't."

"Well things are going to be different this time around!" Kaede responds. "I mean, we're friends!"

"That's right."

Kaede smiles before letting it fall. "Actually, there's something else we should probably talk about."

"Oh?"

"Shirogane," Kaede says. "I just feel sort of bad that she got exposed the way she did, you know? I-I know that assassins are dangerous and maybe I'm being stupid for pitying her but it's like what some people have been saying, she's had plenty of chances to hurt someone here but she hasn't. I think that maybe we should, well, give her a chance and make sure she feels welcome?"

Rantaro doesn't respond and Kaede wonders if she's said the wrong thing. "I'm not too sure what to think about Shirogane to be honest."

"How come?"

"I know it's my fault that she got exposed but in a way, isn't it a good thing that everyone knows about her now?" Rantaro suggests. "It's like you said, assassins are dangerous people and we are in a killing game. Shirogane is always going to have some sort of advantage over us. At least now we can be more wary of her if something were to happen."

"I-I guess so," Kaede mumbles. "But she looked so...sad yesterday."

"Listen, if you want to be friends with her then be my guest," Rantaro says. "But to tell you the truth, she makes me uncomfortable. Something about the fact that she's been lying about her true identity makes me feel weird."

"So you don't even want to try and be friends with her?" Kaede asks.

"I'm just not sure at the moment," Rantaro answers. "Don't take it the wrong way, I do feel bad for her. However, I can't bring myself to befriend her. There's just something off about her."

I guess I can't force him to be friends with her. I just don't understand what he means that he thinks that something is off with her. It's not like she's hiding anything else, right? I mean, I hope she's not hiding anything else.

Kaede's ears perk up when she suddenly hears the sound of wheels spinning and she turns around to see Kirumi marching Tenko down the hallway, one hand on her shoulder and another leading a trolley full of food to the dining room.

"Tenko has been...Tenko has been compromised," Tenko wails as Kirumi clicks her tongue.

"Akamatsu, Amami, I apologise for the prolonged wait for breakfast," Kirumi says. "It seems someone decided to take the food for a walk..."

Ah, so it seems Tenko hasn't mentioned anything about Kaede's involvement. The piano gives Tenko a subtle but grateful look. Tenko beams back happily.

"It's fine," Rantaro says. "At least we can eat now that the trolley has been found."

"The food will be cold now," Kirumi responds. "My apologies but you all must wait a little longer. However, feel free to wait in the dining room. I will prepare some refreshments for everyone whilst I make new dishes."

"Tenko is super sorry!" Tenko apologises as she bows deeply. "Tenko feels really bad that all this food is going to be wasted! At least let Tenko help you make a new breakfast! It's the least Tenko can do!"

"Very well," Kirumi agrees easily. She sighs as she pushes the trolley back into the dining room, giving Tenko firm instructions on what to do.

"Poor Chabashira," Kaede mumbles. "I didn't mean to get her into trouble with Tojo."

"I'm sure Tojo isn't actually that upset," Rantaro says. "She's probably more upset that the food got wasted."

"At least everyone gets to eat soon?" Kaede says with a helpless shrug before following the maid and aikido master into the dining room.

Angie announces her student council before anyone can even bring up anything else.

"So like, Angie has set up a student council and Rantaro and Tenko have already joined!" Angie reveals as she spreads her arms out. "Of course Angie's God is also a part of the council too but he'll mostly be guiding Angie!"

"Um, why do we need student council anyway?" Gonta asks curiously. "We not going to be staying here long enough to need one, right?"

"I hope not," Ryoma mutters, plopping several sugar cubes into his tea.

"Well, um, you see," Angie hums as she fiddles with a paintbrush absentmindedly. "Like, the whole reason Kokichi was killed was because Miu was desperate to leave. So if we make the school into a paradise then people won't become desperate like her!"

"But...leaving the school is our main priority," Kiibo points out slowly. "Why should we bother

wasting time making the school into a paradise when it's not even safe for us to stay here in the first place?"

"I doubt Monokuma would let us just live here happily together," Korekiyo adds. "He'd just give us another time limit and might I add the whole reason we were given a time limit is because we were all getting along too well."

"Don't worry! Angie has already figured out how to deal with that!" Angie reassures the group.

"Hey, maybe we should wait for Momota and Shirogane to come before you tell everyone more about the council?" Tenko suggests nervously. From the look on her face it's clear Angie hadn't told her about the plan to turn the school into a paradise.

Angie shakes her head. "There's no need! Of course Shirogane isn't welcome because God can't love her. Kaito is welcome if he apologises for trying to be friends with Shirogane. Angie's pretty sure that he's just misguided at the moment. Oh, oh! Maybe Shirogane brainwashed him to be her friend-"

"Cut the bullshit," Ryoma sternly snaps. "What the hell are you on about? You can't just force us all to stay here."

"Angie isn't forcing anyone to do anything!" Angie huffs. "Angie is just trying to make the school safer for everyone! Getting rid of any temptation is a good start, no? And threats! So, like, the sooner we get started the better-"

"My apologies, Yonaga, but I simply don't agree with what you're saying," Kirumi says with a grimace. "You simply can't expect everyone to forget about all their friends and family waiting for them. There's people waiting outside for us so of course we don't want to forget about them to live here instead."

"You don't have to forget about them, silly!" Angie smiles. "But Angie bets they'd all be happy knowing everyone is safe inside of these walls instead of dying because they tried to leave! And it's pretty clear that there's only one way to get out of here!"

"Murder," Kaede says softly.

"Hold on, are you sure that's right?" Rantaro asks. "What about the three graduated students? They didn't have to kill to leave."

"Well they're exceptions obviously!" Angie responds. "Like, those three know we're here so all we have to do is wait for them to return!"

"Do you really think they're going to come back?" Kiibo asks hopefully.

Angie nods. "Yep! Because Angie's God told her so! He said all we have to do is wait here and they'll come back with help!"

"How are you so certain that'll happen?" Ryoma questions with a tug of his hat. "Even if you are right, what if they take too long and Monokuma gets bored of waiting?"

"Angie already saaaaid she has that sorted!" Angie says with a dismissive wave of her hand. "So are you all happy with Angie's student council then? The council is going to make sure everyone is safe, of course! Angie has a couple of rules she wants to go over with everyone-"

"Rules?" Korekiyo clearly isn't impressed as he places the cup of tea he'd been drinking onto the

table. “We already have to follow Monokuma’s rules. Why would we want to follow another set?”

“Because they’ll keep everyone safe if everyone promises to follow them!” Angie explains. “You guys, why are you all being so hostile? Can’t you see that Angie is only trying to help? She’s not the enemy here!”

“It simply feels like setting up a council will divide the group,” Kiibo tells her. “Not everyone is going to want to join it.”

“And it’ll cause a power imbalance,” Kirumi adds. “We’re all equal here. It’s unfair for some of us to hold more power than others-”

“Um, like, that’s totally wrong,” Angie says. “Angie has clearly said the council is to keep everyone safe. Why are you all so against it? Angie is only trying to look after everyone! Do you all not want to live in paradise?”

“How can we live in paradise when we’re practically in hell?” Ryoma asks. “Listen, I’m sorry no one likes your idea Angie but you can’t just force people to join and listen to you. There’s plenty of other stuff we have to worry about right now without adding your council to the list.”

Angie’s lips go thin as she sucks in a breath. “How disappointing! Oh well!”

Kaede blinks. “Oh well?”

“Angie isn’t going to disband her council but if no one else wants to join then Angie can’t force them,” Angie says, sounding surprisingly calm. “Angie would just like to say that God will welcome anyone at any time though if anyone changes their mind!”

She’s taking being rejected from the group surprisingly well. I thought she’d be a little more upset. I mean, at least her announcement made everyone else forget about the ticket for now. The longer that people don’t bring that up, the better.

Breakfast is eaten in an awkward silence.

Kaede spends the day talking to different people, realising that she sort of just ignored everyone yesterday.

When it reaches the late afternoon she decides to head back to her room for a break. She only manages to sit down on her bed when there’s a knock on her door. She groans quietly and contemplates just pretending that she didn’t hear the knock when whoever is knocking knocks again rather urgently.

Kaede swallows before she opens the door and is more than surprised to see Kirumi with a frown on her face.

“My apologies for knocking so erratically,” Kirumi says before Kaede can even get a word in. “But there’s something you need to know. Do you remember those lists we made the other day with the list of weapons and poisons?”

“Yeah? What about them?” Kaede feels dread grow in her stomach.

“I was checking the room full of weapons when I noticed something was missing,” Kirumi says as she closes her eyes. “Someone has taken a sickle.”

“A...sickle?” Kaede tries to remember what they look like. “Oh! Like the circular knife thingy?”

“Well, yes, if that’s how you want to describe it,” Kirumi says. “I thought you’d like to know that someone has taken one today. It was definitely there when I checked the list last night.”

“Why would someone take a weapon?” Kaede murmurs to herself as an icy feeling floods her veins. She takes a deep breath. There’s no need to panic just yet. After all, there could be a logical reason for someone to have taken the-

Smash!

Kaede flinches at the loud sound of glass smashing, hiding herself behind her door. “Huh?!”

Kirumi spins around instantly. Kaede spots a shard of glass on the floor just behind the maid.

Did someone just smash the dormitory walls? But why?!

Kaede leaves her room and spots a pile of glass and yellow. “Angie?”

“Yoo hoo!” Angie waves from outside, holding onto the missing sickle. “Hmm, Angie didn’t think that the glass would break so much! Like, the sickle was supposed to stick into it!”

“Yonaga, explain yourself,” Kirumi demands sternly. “What is the meaning of this?”

“On Angie’s island when someone is sad they stab a sickle into their window!” Angie explains. “Angie doesn’t exactly have a window so she decided to just use the wall instead because it’s almost the same thing!”

“Why stab a window with a sickle?” Kirumi asks in confusion.

“So people know that someone is sad!” Angie says as she rolls her eyes. “It’s not that hard to understand! When you spot the sickle you have to console the person and do anything in your power to make them happy, you know? Like, when Angie says you have to do anything she means anything!”

Kaede furrows her brow. “You’re upset?”

Angie fiddles with the handle of the sickle as she says, “well, um, kinda.”

“Please stand back both of you,” Kirumi instructs before sighing. “I understand that you’re upset but you could’ve seriously hurt yourself.”

“But it’s tradition to stab a window with a sickle when you’re sad on Angie’s island,” Angie says. “And no one got hurt!”

“Even so,” Kirumi says gently, “I insist that you take a step back whilst I clean this mess up. After that perhaps you and I can have a talk. Perhaps I can find a way to make you feel less sad.”

“Wow! You’re so wonderful, Kirumi!” Angie cries out as she leaps over the glass to throw her arms around Kirumi tightly. Kaede can see Kirumi freeze. “Your dedication to look after everyone here is so inspiring. Even Angie can’t compete with Kirumi’s dedication! She must really want to keep everyone safe!”

“But of course,” Kirumi says as she squirms uncomfortably. “However, you shouldn’t have jumped over all that glass. Sit down so I can make sure you haven’t cut yourself-”

“Don’t worry! Angie is not hurt!” Angie says. “She’s just sad because no one understands that Angie just wants to help everyone!”

“Yonaga, if this is about your council then you must understand that everyone doesn’t want to stay here,” Kirumi explains carefully. “I understand that you want to help everyone in your own way but to expect everyone to stay here is just too much to ask-”

“But Angie isn’t asking everyone to stay here forever,” Angie says. “She just wants everyone to be safe whilst we wait for help! So if Angie can achieve that with her council then she’ll be very happy!”

Kirumi frowns. “But earlier in the dining room I thought...”

“Everyone just jumped to their own conclusions before Angie could even explain herself!” Angie says. “Angie isn’t trying to trap you all here! She’s just trying to help! A couple of extra rules isn’t going to hurt anyone!”

“I...” Kirumi shakes her head as she gently removes herself from Angie’s hug. “Even so, it’s my duty to make sure everyone’s stay here is as comfortable as possible. A couple of rules might not seem much to you but it might cause additional distress to everyone else. My apologies but if you’re trying to recruit me into your council then I’m going to have to decline.”

Angie pouts as she lets her sickle dangle by her side. “Aw man! Angie thought Kirumi would be perfect for her council too!”

“If circumstances were different then I would’ve loved to have joined your council,” Kirumi reassures her. “However, there’s simply no reason for me to join. I agree that it’s important that we all keep each other safe but having a council forcing people to follow rules is just a little too extreme.”

“Angie is so pleased that Kirumi agrees that everyone needs to be kept safe!” Angie smiles. “So, like if Kirumi really doesn’t want to join the council then Angie can’t force her buuut...”

“But?” Kaede raises an eyebrow. “She doesn’t want to join your council so just drop it-”

“Oh, Angie already knows that!” Angie says. “But Kirumi saw Angie’s sickle so she has to make her happy! Don’t worry, Kirumi doesn’t have to do that much!”

“Are you making a request?” Kirumi asks curiously.

Angie nods. “Yep! If Kirumi wants to make Angie really happy then she just needs to promise that she’ll keep Angie and everyone safe no matter what!”

“That’s all you want?” Kirumi asks. “Very well, that is a request I can promise to do. After all, I’ve always intended to keep everyone at the school happy and safe from the moment we all woke up here.”

“Excellent!” Angie claps her hands together. “Angie feels super safe now that she knows Kirumi will protect her from absolutely anything!”

“If that’s how you feel then I’m glad,” Kirumi says. “Now I must insist you leave so I can clear up the glass. Akamatsu, please go back into your room for the time being. I don’t want either of you to accidentally cut yourselves.”

“Of course! Of course!” Angie complies as she skips away with the sickle still in her hand.

“W-Wait! You need to put that back!” Kaede calls after her.

“Angie is just gonna leave it in her art room just in case she needs to use it again!” Angie responds.
“Kaede shouldn’t worry so much! Angie promises that it’s not gonna move from that room!”

Kirumi sighs heavily, shaking her head. “It’s fine, Akamatsu. As long as we know where the sickle is then it shouldn’t be too big of a problem that Angie keeps it in her art room. If it’s her custom to use one when needed then...”

Kaede exhales through her nose. “As long as it doesn’t move from that room then fine.”

She’s too groggy to do much for the rest of the day and as much as she wants to rest, she can’t.
Why? Kaito Momota.

The two of them are sitting outside under the starry sky on the grass.

“Are you doing okay? You’re looking a little pale,” Kaito points out.

Kaede nods. “Yeah, I just have a bit of a headache, that’s all.”

“Nothing that a couple of exercises can’t fix!” Kaito says and Kaede groans, flopping down onto the grass.

“No offence but I’m too tired,” Kaede moans as she drops her arm over her eyes. “I was up super early this morning with Chabashira and had to deal with a lot of stuff today. I’m sorry but can we maybe do something else?”

Kaito tilts his head to the side. “You exercise with Chabashira?”

“Yeah, every morning,” Kaede says. “We go to her dojo and practice her Neo-Aikido.”

“Aw man, that sounds like it’s so much fun!” Kaito rubs his hands together before pulling a face.
“But you know, getting beaten up by Chabashira for going into her dojo sounds less fun.”

Kaede snorts. “I’m sure if you just asked her then she’d let you join in.”

“But she’s so scary!” Kaito whines.

“She’s not! Chabashira is lovely! I’m really grateful to be her friend,” Kaede tells him.

“Well, you’re a girl so of course you get along with her!” Kaito huffs. “Well, at least you’re opening up to more people. I was sort of worried for a moment that you weren’t going to come out of your shell.”

“I just needed some encouragement, that’s all,” Kaede says. “So, um, thanks.”

“What are you thanking me for?” Kaito asks. “Did I do something?”

“You helped me!” Kaede says in bewilderment.

“You don’t have to thank me for that!” Kaito laughs. “It’s my job to look after my sidekicks! Speaking of sidekicks, did you manage to speak with Maki today?”

Kaede shakes her head. “I’ve just been so busy today that it didn’t even cross my mind.”

“As long as you speak to her soon,” Kaito says. “She’s not been saying much but I can tell she’s hurting. I just wish she wasn’t such a coward! She’s not going to improve herself by hiding away all of the time!”

“Isn’t that a little harsh?” Kaede frowns. “If she’s hiding away then there must be a reason why.”

“I just want her to open up to me,” Kaito responds. “I ain’t gonna judge her or anything! She should know that!”

“Maybe she doesn’t,” Kaede says. “Momota, you don’t know what she’s been through. You can expect her to open up to you in just a day. Befriending her is going to take time.”

“But she befriended you easily when we got here…” Kaito rubs his chin. “Hmm, what’s it about you that she likes more than me I wonder?”

“I don’t know,” Kaede admits. “But maybe try not to push her so hard. It could be that she’s desperate to befriend you but she doesn’t know how now that her secret is out in the open. Just don’t expect too much from her so soon.”

“I guess,” Kaito sighs before he starts to wave wildly. “Kaede look! Chabashira is gonna come outside!”

Kaede feels excited when she sees Tenko leave the dormitories, hugging her tablet to her chest. Her eyes widen as she dashes over to the two, looking rather conflicted by something.

“Um, Momota?” Tenko suddenly asks. “Do you know where Shirogane is?”

“In her room, right?” Kaito responds. “Why?”

Tenko shakes her head as she shows him her tablet. “The map on the tablet says that she’s upstairs in the art room. Why would she be up there?”

“Huh?” Kaito grabs the tablet and stares at it. “That doesn’t make any sense. I could’ve sworn she was in her room!”

“Tenko is going to go and see what’s going on,” Tenko says as she grabs her tablet back. “Tenko may be wary of Shirogane but she would also like to know that she’s okay. Tenko simply finds it odd that she’s up there.”

“Wait up, we’ll come too!” Kaito says, pulling Kaede up as he stands.

The pianist almost trips over her feet but she isn’t too upset.

I’m curious why Tsumugi is upstairs too, in the art room no less. The map didn’t show Angie was there so what reason would Tsumugi have to go up there on her own?

“Akamatsu! Please don’t look so worried,” Tenko says as she squeezes Kaede’s hand. “Tenko is sure everything will be fine! Maybe she went for a walk or something?”

“Yeah, she probably got sick of staying in her room all day!” Kaito adds. “Besides, now is the perfect chance for you both to patch things up!”

Trust Kaito to be so optimistic in a situation like this. However, Kaede can’t help but give him a smile because maybe he’s right. Maybe if she catches Tsumugi on her own then maybe the two of them can sit down and talk. It’s about time Kaede spoke to her.

Tenko then lets out a sudden squeal as they reach the spooky floor of the school. Kaede's about to ask her what's wrong when Tenko hugs her. "Tenko is just so happy that Akamatsu has so many friends now! She was super worried that Akamatsu wouldn't open up to others but now Tenko sees that she has nothing to worry about anymore! Tenko is just so relieved!"

"T-There's no need to make such a big deal out of it!" Kaede insists as she feels her cheeks heat up. However, she does give Tenko's back a quick pat. "But thanks, Chabashira. I mean it. I don't think I would be as open as I am if it wasn't for your encouragement."

"Tenko's happy that she was able to help!" Tenko says as she lets the pianist go. "Now, let's go and find Shirogane!"

Kaito stands unusually close to Kaede as the three walk through the eerie halls. When she asks him about it he insists that it's nothing but Kaede can't help but think that maybe Kaito's a little more spooked than he's letting on.

As they near the art room Tenko suddenly holds her hand out, forcing Kaede to stop. She yelps as Kaito crashes into her. Clearly he wasn't paying much attention. Kaede pouts as she rubs her arm.

"Tenko thinks she can hear something," Tenko says and before Kaede can stop her, she speeds on ahead and yanks open the door to the art room and steps inside and-

"C-Chabashira?!"

Kaede hears something...wet. Something...*wrong*?

Kaito rushes past her. It's like her legs have turned into stone as she forces them forward towards the doorway and she can't help but stare and stare because...

...there's a sickle pressed into Tenko's stomach?

Tsumugi is there too with her hands covering her mouth and her eyes wide and watery behind her glasses. Kaito is clearly in shock as he clutches the door frame tightly because clearly he wasn't expecting to walk in on this.

It feels like an eternity when Kaede finally spots the hands clutching the handle of the sickle that's still in Tenko's stomach. They're trembling. Kaede slowly looks away from the hands to look at Angie's face. Shocked. Confused. Scared.

It doesn't even compare to Tenko's expression of absolute agony.

No one moves at first, everyone clearly in the same state of shock. Then, Tenko makes this *sound*, this small pained sound that finally snaps Kaede out of it and she forces her way into the room.

"We need...we need to just take it out and stop the bleeding, right?" Kaede says as she reaches for the sickle's handle, only to be forcefully stopped by Kaito, who grabs her wrist so tightly and suddenly that Kaede jumps.

"That'll just make things worse," Kaito snaps. "Fucks sake, Angie! Let it go!"

Angie lets go of the handle as if it was red hot, stumbling backwards into a block of unused wax as she opens and closes her mouth. It's like she can't decide what to look at as she stares at the sickle, then at Tenko, then at Tsumugi and then at Kaede.

Kaito starts swearing under his breath as his hands twitch and to Kaede's horror she realises he

doesn't know what to do. No one does. He at least manages to catch Tenko by her shoulders as her knees buckle and he holds her, making sure to not press the sickle into her stomach any further.

"W-Who knows first aid?" Tsumugi suddenly starts murmuring. "Ah, this is way past first aid. Um, um...oh! Tojo might know what to do, right?"

"Then go and get her!" Kaito yells at her as Tenko's legs give up altogether. He lowers both himself and her to the floor. "A little help here, Kaede?"

"I don't..." Kaede freezes. "I don't know what to do-"

"Listen, just take a deep breath," Kaito says. "There's no time to start panicking now. Chabashira needs us. Keep talking to her whilst I figure out what to do with this thing."

Kaede can do that, talking that is. She kneels by Tenko's head and the aikido master looks up at her with wide eyes.

Not again...I don't think I can watch the life drain from someone's eyes again...

"H-Hey, listen to m-me," Kaede stutters out as she desperately tries to smile comfortingly. "We're gonna...we're gonna help. Ah, everything is going to be okay! S-So don't look so s-scared! I'm sure once Tojo is here t-then..."

"Akamatsu...is such an ugly crier," Tenko whispers softly.

Kaede blinks wildly as she realises her cheeks are wet. She sniffs as she wipes them with her sleeves, ignoring how uncomfortable the now wet sleeves feel against her skin. "S-Sorry-"

"Akamatsu has nothing...to apologise...about," Tenko continues. "It makes Tenko so...happy to see Akamatsu cry without any shame. It shows...Akamatsu is growing as a person."

"Don't w-waste your breath talking about me!" Kaede swallows down a heavy lump in her throat. "I'm supposed to be comforting you, remember?"

"You being here is comforting enough," Tenko says before wincing.

"S-Sorry," Kaito mumbles as his hands fly away from Tenko's body. "Shit, how the hell do I get this thing out of you..."

"I found her!"

Tsumugi bursts through the door and Kirumi follows behind her with her hands full of stuff Kaede doesn't even bother to look at. She is knocked out of the way by someone and she feels a hand on her shoulder before someone is leading her out of the room.

"W-Wait, I need to be in there," Kaede pleads, struggling against the hand, which she realises belongs to Kaito.

The astronaut shakes his head. "Tojo needs space and she won't be able to concentrate if the room is full of panicking people."

"But Chabashira needs me!" Kaede insists, lunging for the door. This time Kaito pulls her back a little more forcefully. "Momota, *please!* I can't just leave her! I need to be in there!"

"Kaede, you just need to trust Tojo," Kaito tells her. "There's nothing else we can do but wait."

“But...” Kaede feels her bottom lip wobble as this ugly feeling washes over her. This is so unfair. Why Tenko? Kaede feels her shoulders shake as she feels herself break. Kaito rubs her shoulder in comfort.

Students start to crowd the hallway one by one, clearing realising that something is up. They probably saw that so many people were upstairs and got curious. Distantly, Kaede can hear Kiibo ask Kaito what happened and when the astronaut answers, Kaede flinches.

It's only when a slither of yellow catches Kaede's eye that she finally springs to life. Her body feels like it's on autopilot as she pushes past people to reach Angie, who is standing at the end of the hallway with a blank expression. Her blue eyes meet Kaede's and Kaede thinks Angie might've said something. If she did it's drowned out by the sound of a loud slap that ricochets off the walls.

Angie's head jerks to the side instantly and Kaede can feel even her *own* palm sting as it hovers in the air.

She doesn't think she's ever been this angry in her life as her hand trembles into a fist. “What the *hell have you done?!*”

When the artist doesn't answer, Kaede sees red. It takes at least three others to hold her back as she shrieks, her frayed thread of patience finally snapping. She doesn't really remember what she shouts, only that she wants Angie to hurt, to suffer about what she's done. If someone tries to stop her, well, Kaede certainly doesn't hear it.

Someone starts pushing her away, down the hallway and she fights back furiously.

“Let me go! I need to-”

“You need to calm down,” Rantaro says.

“How can I calm down when Chabashira's dying and Angie is just standing there?!” Kaede shouts back. “She stabbed her, Amami! With that stupid sickle because I was dumb enough to let her keep it!”

“Hey, hey, hey! Seriously, Akamatsu, you need to try and remain calm,” Rantaro insists. “I know that's not easy right now but-”

“If Chabashira dies then I'll never forgive her!” Kaede snaps, letting out a shaky breath as she runs her hands through her hair roughly.

“Tojo is trying her best to make sure that Chabashira will be fine,” Rantaro says. “I know it's hard but all anyone can do at the moment is just wait and hope for the best.”

Kaede bites the inside of her mouth as she leans back against a wall, squeezing her eyes shut before rubbing them furiously with the palm of her hands. “Why her? Why did it have to be her?”

“I don't know,” Rantaro says. “I really don't know.”

“S-She was walking with us! She was by my side the entire time!” Kaede's tongue feels heavy. “T-Then she stopped Momota and I because she said she heard something and ran off before either of us could even say anything!”

“Did...did you see her get...you know?” Rantaro prompts carefully.

“Not exactly,” Kaede says quietly. “I just heard this...noise and then the next thing I knew,

Chabashira was standing there with a sickle in her stomach after stepping into the art room. S-Shirogane and Angie were also there-”

“Huh? They were?” Rantaro frowns. “But...”

“Angie was the one holding the sickle,” Kaede continues as dread continues to twirl around in her stomach. “S-She stabbed Chabashira because Chabashira got...got in the way. She stepped into the room at the wrong time and...”

“So her being stabbed was an accident?” Rantaro asks as he runs a hand down his face. “Shit...”

“She only went to see if Shirogane was okay because she saw her on the map,” Kaede explains. “I just don’t know why Shirogane was up here with Angie.”

“From the looks of things Angie probably told Shirogane to meet her in her art room,” Rantaro says. “I know it was Chabashira who was stabbed accidentally but she wasn’t Angie’s target, was she?”

“No...” Kaede shakes her head. “It was Shirogane.”

Rantaro has a grim expression on his face as he crosses his arms and sighs loudly. “Why would she do something so stupid as to try and kill Shirogane? Everyone knew Angie didn’t like her but I didn’t think that...”

“I just don’t get what right she thinks she has to try and kill someone!” Kaede says. “How dare she-”

“If you decide to roll that shot put ball down the vent then the only person you’ll be killing is him, you know?”

“You guys, why are you all being so hostile? Can’t you see that Angie is only trying to help? She’s not the enemy here!”

“She’s just sad because no one understands that Angie just wants to help everyone!”

It feels like someone has dumped a bucket of icy cold water over her head. Kaede freezes as she carefully places her hands on the wall to keep her balance, her eyes wide. She’s not aware that she’s gone scarily silent. All that she can hear is her heart beating furiously against her chest.

How ironic...how ironic that she’s so upset right now. If she hadn’t been stopped by Kokichi all those days ago then she’d probably not be here right now. She’d picked up a shot put ball and intended to use it, to roll it down the vent and crush the skull of the mastermind. She even went as far as fixing up the books on top of the shelves too...

A couple of days ago she was going to murder someone because she saw them as her enemy and here she is furious that someone had the exact same idea as her.

Her legs must give out or something because she ends up on the floor, knees digging sharply into the wooden floorboards. Rantaro ends up kneeling down next to her and he’s probably trying to comfort her but she can’t hear him over the sound of her ears roaring.

She only snaps her head up when she sees a long skirt and spots Kirumi dashing down the hallway with a bloody towel. Kaede doesn’t remember getting up and following after her. She grabs Kirumi’s sleeve tightly.

“Akamatsu, I understand you’re upset but I’m in a rush,” Kirumi says as she firmly removes Kaede’s hand from her dress. “I must search for something to seal up the wound-”

“Please save them,” Kaede mumbles in a daze. “Please, Tojo. Save them, s-save her. She just made a mistake like me. Angie she...”

“Akamatsu, leave Tojo alone,” Rantaro says, clearly breathless after chasing after the two. “Sorry, Tojo. I think she’s just in shock or-”

“It’s not a problem,” Kirumi says. She turns away but hesitates. “Akamatsu, what you just said...was that a request?”

“Angie made a mistake,” Kaede quietly responds. “Please don’t let her be punished for it.”

“...I’ll try my best.”

Rantaro is clearly confused by Kaede’s sudden change in behaviour. However, he seems more relieved by the fact Kaede has finally snapped out of...whatever state she was in before. “You’re a good person, you know? For caring about Angie even despite everything.”

“I’d be a huge hypocrite otherwise,” Kaede mumbles as she sinks down onto the floor, sitting down on the top of the stairs. Rantaro sits next to her quietly. “I just want...want this nightmare to be over.”

Obviously Rantaro doesn’t have an answer to that. No one knows when the game is going to end, how the game is even going to come to an end. Kaede swallows before leaning her head to the side and onto his shoulder, closing her eyes.

All everyone can do now is wait...

Kirumi returns and is left alone with Tenko once more.

It’s...quiet. There’s no idle chit chat or speculating or even blaming going on. The entire school has gone quiet.

Kaede thinks she might’ve dozed off for a moment or two because suddenly there’s a hand on her shoulder and her eyes shoot open. There’s this...horrible silence as Kaede turns her head to see Kirumi looking back at her with this look of...sympathy.

The maid doesn’t even have to say anything and Kaede is on her feet, numbly following after her as she leads her into the art room.

Kirumi has put a sheet over Tenko’s body and Kaede doesn’t dare to move it as she stumbles towards the body and kneels next to it. There’s a couple of speckles of blood already soaking through the sheet that Kaede stares at.

“I thought you’d like to say goodbye before the body discovery announcement is played,” Kirumi says gently. “My most sincere apologies, Akamatsu. I tried my best to stop the bleeding but with no medical equipment...”

Kaede can see blood streaking down Kirumi’s skirts and how her gloves are looking unusually shiny and wet. She doesn’t doubt for even a second that Kirumi didn’t try her best but at the same time she feels bitter. The most she can offer Kirumi is a silent nod as her fists curl up by her sides.

“Chabashira...” Kaede croaks out before shaking her head and letting out a wail she knows

everyone outside hears.

Tenko always preferred to show her emotions rather than talk about them. She knows that I cared about her, right? As much as I want to tell her how much I did, all I can do is cry. I'm so sorry, Tenko.

Kirumi stands guard at the door until Kaede is prepared to leave. Kaede has no clue how long she's sobbing on the floor for. She doesn't remember moving to stand in front of the door, silent as Kirumi steps to the side. Kaede pushes open the door and winces when the awful sound of the body discovery announcement plays.

Monokuma appears all too quickly. "Well, well, well--"

"Shut up, just shut up," Kaito snaps. "No one wants to hear your shit. Just tell us what needs to be said and go."

"I didn't even say anything," Monokuma mumbles gloomily. "And here I was excited because someone finally died--"

"Do you want to say that again?" Ryoma asks and the look in his eyes is deadly.

"S-Seriously! Youths these days can't take a joke anymore. You're all always offended by something," Monokuma says. "As much as I would love to taunt you all even I'm a little upset! From the looks of things, there isn't even going to be a class trial and they're my favourite--"

"No one asked," Korekiyo says. "Simply tell us what happens now."

"Well usually there would be an investigation and I'd start updating the Monokuma Files," Monokuma explains. "However, in a situation like this even I can tell that doing all that is just going to be a waste of time."

"Yeah, because we already know who killed Chabashira," Kaito huffs as he gives Angie an unreadable look. "So what happens now?"

"Punishment time, of course!" Monokuma cheers as his eyes light up. "But, Momota? Are you sure you want to be presuming things so quickly?"

Kaito raises an eyebrow. "And what's that supposed to mean?"

"I am all seeing," Monokuma says. "I know what's happening at all times here. I especially keep a close eye when a murder happens! After all, I love watching all the gory details!"

"J-Just explain yourself," Tsumugi says nervously.

"He means you all shouldn't be quick to jump to conclusions," Kirumi says.

"That's right! If this was an actual class trial and you were all going to cast your vote, you'd all be voting for Angie, right?" Monokuma asks with a giggle.

"Well...yes," Kiibo agrees. "Because she was the one who stabbed Chabashira, right?"

"...something tells me something is wrong," Ryoma says slowly.

"That's because you're all wrong about who killed Chabashira," Kirumi says.

It's Angie herself who blurts out, "but Angie was the one who stabbed--"

“Whilst it’s true that you stabbed her,” Kirumi says as she clasps her hands together, “I was the cause of her death.”

Kaede can feel bile rise up her throat. “W-Wait-”

“How are you the cause of her death?” Korekiyo asks. “You were the one who tried to save her. Don’t tell me that her passing away because you couldn’t save her makes you feel like you’re the cause of her death?”

Kirumi shakes her head. “Of course I don’t blame myself for not being able to save her. My apologies if this upsets anyone but the chances of Chabashira surviving were always slim. It didn’t take me long to realise that I was simply drawing out her pain by trying to save her.”

“So...what did Tojo do?” Gonta asks. “Gonta no understand...”

“I...” Kirumi bows her head. “I stopped her suffering.”

“That doesn’t mean she’s the killer, right?” Kaito asks as he spins to face Monokuma. “She was only-”

“Finishing my request,” Kirumi says.

Kaede shakes her head furiously at the implication. However, no matter how hard she tries she can’t speak.

“Oh how devastating!” Monokuma snuffles. “This is so beary hard to watch! Even this is tugging at my heartstrings and I don’t even have a heart! Which means punishing her has just gotten a whole lot easier!”

“You’re punishing her?!” Kaito cries out in anger. “You can’t do that! She-”

“She made her choice and now she has to deal with the consequences!” Monokuma declares. “Now if you’re all done whining then everyone down to the trial ground! I’ve got a very special punishment prepared for the Ultimate Maid!”

It’s a walk no one wants to take. Kaede herself only moves because Monokuma starts threatening everyone with punishments of their own. She holds herself tight as she stumbles away from the art room, giving it one final look before leaving.

Outside, Kaede shivers. She can hear that some people are arguing whilst some others have quietly accepted that Monokuma is cruel and vile and horrible for taking Kirumi away from them.

The large Monokuma statue in the fountain explodes into pieces, revealing an elevator that only goes down. Everyone files into it one by one until it’s only Kaede, Kirumi and Monokuma outside.

“Akamatsu, please come with me,” Kirumi says as she waits expectantly outside of the elevator.

Kaede stares at her, stares at everyone else, stares at Monokuma and then pauses.

No more...I won’t let him take away anyone else from me!

Some sort of instinct kicks in as Kaede suddenly kicks Monokuma. Hard. He topples to the floor and Kaede starts shouting. “Tojo, run!”

“What?” Kirumi stares at her. “But-”

“Hurry up and run!” Kaede cries, taking a step back as Monokuma pulls himself up angrily.

“Run, Tojo!” Kaito joins in.

One after another, everyone cheers the maid on. Kirumi hesitates before her face turns serious. “Very well, I shall consider this my final request.”

Kaede almost misses Kirumi as she bolts through the red door. The pianist finds herself cheering, despite Monokuma glaring daggers into her.

“Oh no you don’t!” Monokuma’s shrill voice shrieks. “No one ever escapes my punishments!”

Game Over

Kirumi Tojo has been found guilty

Time for punishment!

As Kirumi runs through the red door she is greeted by a long hallway that stretches out. She stops abruptly, clearly surprised by her new and sudden location. She looks around nervously, turning pale as she hears the sound of hundreds of people approaching her.

Groups of people burst through doors at either end of the hallway, some of them holding signs, some of them holding weapons and some of them simply yelling angrily at her. Kirumi clearly doesn’t know where to go as all of her exits are blocked. A drop of sweat trickles down her face. Then, in a blink of an eye, a thorny thread is dropped in front of her.

Kirumi stares at it and glances up, spotting light. Her eyes widen and she reaches up in awe. She looks at the thread and then at the people. Reaching out she grabs the vine...

...and knocks it away. These people, as angry as they are, need her.

The thread is destroyed as hundreds of people run past it, tearing it apart in the process. Kirumi prepares herself as everyone gets closer, readying herself to help them one by one. However, what startles her is that not a single person stops and she’s swallowed up by a crowd that only gets bigger and bigger.

It’s hard to spot Kirumi after that. She’s only found when the crowd leaves, face down on the floor and still, crushed by the weight of trying to burden herself with too much responsibility.

Kaede gets told off by Monokuma of course. He promises her if she ever pulls a stunt like that again then she’ll join the rest of the dead.

She dashes off to her room before anyone can even stop her and collapses onto her bed, screaming into her pillow until her throat is sore. So that’s what a punishment looks like. She wants to vomit.

It takes her hours before she even has the strength to crawl out of bed and grab two photographs. She sniffs as she pins both Tenko and Kirumi up on her whiteboard and flops back down on her bed moments later.

She doesn’t sleep that night and it’s obvious why.

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 3 Part 1

Chapter Notes

This update would've been quicker but I got sick and it took me longer to actually start the chapterahaha. The last couple of chapters have been kind of depressing so this is a more light-hearted one. However, this chapter is equally as important as the others :) I'm also trying to cut down how long each chapter is because the last one was well over 20k words long and idk that just seems a little too much?

Thank you so much for the comments! Also thank you for the 200+ kudos!!!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

Tenko's dojo is gone the next morning.

Kaede simply stares as Monokuma demolishes it gleefully. The black and white bear gives her a wave which she promptly ignores. She watches him break the dojo until the building finally collapses in on itself and crumbles to the floor.

If Monokuma says something to her then she doesn't hear it. Silently, Kaede turns away and heads inside with her head held high. She realises doesn't have any tears left to cry.

She finds Ryoma in the dining room at around six in the morning. She is startled momentarily by the fact that there's someone else awake so early in the morning but quickly calms down. She instinctively ducks her head down as he gives her a look.

It sounds selfish but she doesn't think she can handle people constantly asking if she's okay. She's...surviving. She's alive. That's what matters the most right now. It would be a lie to say that she's fine because she's not. However she doesn't want to be seen as some poor girl who just lost her friend either.

Kaede is tired. She is so, so tired.

But that doesn't mean I have given up just yet!

"Good morning, Hoshi," Kaede says as she steps into the room, adjusting the straps of her bag before clearing her throat. "I didn't expect anyone else to be awake to be completely honest."

Ryoma looks her up and down and Kaede swallows. She knows how badly she reacted to Tenko's death yesterday and she's expecting the entire school to ask her if she's okay. However, some exhausted part of her doesn't want people asking about her wellbeing. It's selfish but she doesn't want people worrying over her. She just wants to get on with her day.

"Hey," Ryoma says, giving her a subtle nod. "I have some rice cooking if you're hungry for breakfast, although it's not going to be ready for a while yet."

"Ah, that's..." Kaede pauses as she looks into the kitchen. For a moment she imagines Kirumi

dashing around the small room. She shakes her head. "Thanks but I'm not hungry just yet. I came in here for a drink to be completely honest."

"Well the kettle has just boiled," Ryoma responds as he gestures to his own cup of coffee. "Or there's juice in the fridge if you don't fancy anything warm."

Kaede blinks before sitting down at the table and helping herself to the kettle and a cup, preparing a cup of coffee for herself. "How long have you, um, been awake for?"

"I always wake up when the sun does," Ryoma admits. "Been like that ever since I went to prison. At least I always have some sort of routine to follow and I think I'd get irritated if I had to wake up to Monokuma's voice everyday."

"You do have a point," Kaede agrees, grimacing as she thinks about the murderous bear. She tightens her grip on her cup. "So, um..."

"You don't have to talk about yesterday if you don't want to," Ryoma tells her before tugging on his hat. "I'm not going to pretend that I understand how you feel but you had this look in your eyes when you walked through the doors that you wanted to be left alone."

"Is that so?" Kaede flushes. "Sorry, I wasn't trying to be rude or anything."

"Nah, it's fine," he responds before sighing. "It's understandable. I'd get annoyed too if people kept asking me if I was okay all the time. Although, if you do want to talk then there's nothing stopping you either. I can listen or we can both just sit in silence."

Kaede bites down on her lip. A small part of her feels guilty that she's never actually spent much time with some students here, like Ryoma. Despite practically ignoring him for days on end he's still being nice to her. "I-I'm honestly not sure what I want right now. I just...want a break from everything."

"If only," Ryoma agrees and takes a long sip of his coffee. "Hey, not to cause you any distress or anything but I thought you'd might like to know this. I saw Monokuma destroying another floor of the academy. He's also destroyed-"

"Chabashira's dojo," Kaede says. "Yeah, he made sure I was watching."

Ryoma's eyes narrow and Kaede swears she sees a flash of anger in them. "Is that so," he huffs. "Seems he'll do anything to make sure we're all miserable. Sorry you had to see that."

"It's fine," Kaede says before staring into her cup of coffee. "It didn't hurt as much as I expected it to. It's just Chabashira and I always exercised in that dojo every morning. I kinda wanted to continue to use it but now that it's gone..."

"The tennis room has plenty of space," Ryoma tells her. "I can turn off the machines so it'll be safe to exercise in if you want to use that room. I probably won't join you but I couldn't care less if you want to take over the room."

"That's..." Kaede offers him a small smile. "That's really nice of you. Thank you, Hoshi."

"I don't use it anyway and have no plans to either," Ryoma admits before sighing. "Although I do see Momota go in there sometimes. He keeps trying to get me to play with him even though I've told him I don't play anymore. Wish the kid would just give up already."

"I think he's just trying to be nice," Kaede says hesitantly. "I mean, you don't have to play with

him but maybe if you just play a game or two with him then maybe he'll leave you alone?"

Ryoma snorts. "I know you're friends with him but you have to admit he has that annoying streak where he keeps pushing and pushing until he gets his own way. I know he doesn't mean any harm but if I agree to one game then that'll lead to two games and then three and..."

"You really don't like tennis, do you?" Kaede asks softly. "Although I guess I understand. If something bad happened to me relating to my piano then I'd..."

"Are you doing alright there, Akamatsu? You suddenly went quiet," Ryoma says.

Kaede nods furiously. "I'm fine. It's just, um, this is going to sound so stupid. A couple of days ago I played a song for...Chabashira and Angie and I ended up getting so upset I had some sort of panic attack. W-Which was super scary because I've never had one before and had no reason to have one. It's just as soon as I started to play this particular song..."

"That is weird," Ryoma agrees. "Have you had any problems playing that particular song before?"

"No," Kaede says. "It's the easiest song to learn! I could play it even in my sleep!"

"Maybe Monokuma has something to do with it," Ryoma suggests. "It's not unreasonable to presume he's done something to mess with us and not warn us about it."

"I suppose." Kaede closes her eyes. "It just really upsets me that I can't even play the piano anymore without feeling scared. Playing piano is kind of my entire life. If Monokuma has ruined that for me then I'll never forgive him."

"...you said that playing the piano caused you to get distressed, right?" Ryoma suddenly asks. Kaede nods and Ryoma frowns. "Between you and me I never had an issue with water before I got here. However, I was washing my hands in the sink in my lab the other day and I suddenly felt like I couldn't breathe. It was a strange feeling that came out of nowhere. It has never happened again but the fact that it did in the first place..."

"I also had another experience that was sort of like that!" Kaede's eyes widened. "When Shirogane, Amami and I explored the school when we first got here I ended up feeling really sick when I was about to step into the library for some reason! It just...happened for no reason at all. A-And Amami felt the same!"

"Maybe we should ask the others if they've had similar experiences," Ryoma suggests. "Don't know what it'll achieve but it might help us figure something out."

Kaede nods. "Yeah, maybe..."

Ryoma looks like he's about to say something else when he abruptly stands up. He shoots Kaede an apologetic look. "Sorry, I just remembered I need to check on the rice. Not going to lie, I'm not the best cook. Well, I'm not going to cook anything as good as Tojo did anyway."

Kaede grimaces as Ryoma leaves the room momentarily, staring down at her shaky hands. Perhaps she's being selfish but it's only just hit her that she's never going to eat any of Kirumi's delicious cooking ever again. It's certainly more tragic that Kirumi lost her life but Kaede is already mourning the loss of such a warm and motherly figure in such a cold and brutal killing game.

Losing both Tenko and Kirumi so quickly and swiftly...

"It's fine," Ryoma says as he walks back into the kitchen and Kaede jolts, coffee sloshing over the

side of her cup and onto the table. “Ah...my bad, I didn’t mean to scare you. Let me get you a paper towel or-”

“Tojo dying yesterday...” Kaede says before swallowing. “I told her to make sure Angie wouldn’t get punished for her mistake and Tojo saw it as a request to save her. If I hadn’t asked her to save Angie then would she still be here today? A-And would Angie be dead right now?”

“You shouldn’t go around blaming yourself for other people’s actions,” Ryoma tells her. “The only reason Tojo died yesterday was because of her pride as being the Ultimate Maid. It doesn’t matter if you asked her to save Angie or not because it was Tojo who made the decision to do so. You didn’t force her to kill Chabashira, that was her own choice and her choice alone.”

“But...”

“You still have a ways to go if you’re always going to think about what ifs,” Ryoma says. “It’s easy to fantasize about things playing out differently and it’s hard to accept the truth. I’m not saying you’re a bad person for wanting things to be different right now, I bet every single person in the school feels the same way. However, the world isn’t going to wait for you to stop dreaming.”

Kaede can feel her throat tighten. “I...I see.”

“Listen, I have no intentions of hurting or scaring you,” Ryoma tells her. “I just think it would be a shame if you died before you’re ready to.”

For a second it feels like all the air has left her lungs. She stares at the tennis player silently, twisting her hands together nervously before smiling. “Thank you, Hoshi. I mean it. I really needed to hear that.”

“I only say stuff that needs to be said,” Ryoma responds. However, Kaede can see the small smile he’s trying to hide. “But don’t think that a couple of encouraging words are the reason you’re feeling better right now. You’re the one who decided to get up today despite everything. You’re stronger than you think, Akamatsu.”

The two enjoy a comfortable chat together that lasts well over an hour. Kaede talks about her favourite piano recitals. Ryoma talks about his pet cat. Kaede asks him some easy questions that don’t pry too far into his personal life. Ryoma asks her about her family and her sister.

Kaede is on her third cup of coffee when the dining room doors burst open so abruptly that she almost spills it all over herself. She can feel all the hairs on her arms stand up, hell, even the odd strand of hair that she can never smooth down freezes into position as she takes a couple of deep breaths.

Ryoma, on the other hand, looks unfazed as he stares at the new arrivals. Kaede sees him raise an eyebrow and she wonders who exactly is behind her when a couple of voices start shouting.

“Where Akamatsu?! Gonta can no find her-”

“It’s not like her to just disappear! Where did she-”

“I’m just as worried as you both are but maybe keep the noise...ah.”

Kaede turns around in her chair to see Gonta, Kaito and Rantaro looking down at her in surprise. Kaede blinks before tilting her head to the side. “Hey, Gonta? Why are you carrying around a door?”

“Uh...” Gonta grits his teeth. “Gonta woke up and thought he should check on Akamatsu since he thought she be upset! Momota and Amami were already there though and they said Akamatsu wasn’t answering so...”

“We asked Gonta to help us open the door,” Rantaro says sheepishly.

Gonta looks extremely upset as he cradles the door to his chest. “Gonta no mean to pull the door from wall! So, um, Akamatsu is missing her bedroom door now. Sorry! Gonta give it back to her though!”

“N-No thanks!” Kaede holds up her hands as Gonta suddenly thrusts the large piece of wood towards her. “Maybe just prop it up against the wall for now? Maybe we can fix it...” She notices how the door is heavily splintered down the side. She pulls a face. “...later.”

“Gonta a horrible gentleman!” Gonta declares. “Gentleman should never pull a lady’s door from her wall! But Monokuma even worse! He said he no fix door either!”

Kaede opens and closes her mouth and lets out a noise of confusion and turns to Kaito for an explanation. He sighs as he rubs the back of his head. “Monokuma turned up all pissed off since we technically broke school property. I guess he wasn’t pissed off enough to punish us for it but he said he wasn’t wasting his time fixing the door so...”

“Akamatsu can have Gonta’s room!” Gonta instantly offers as his face brightens up. “Gonta sleep somewhere else! It only fair!”

“I-I can’t take your room!” Kaede panics as she looks around. “Um...”

“There’s plenty of other rooms Akamatsu can borrow,” Rantaro reassures the large male. “Don’t worry too much, Gonta. You didn’t mean for any of this to happen.”

“Gonta didn’t mean to make such a mess,” Gonta pouts. “So Gonta do everything he can to fix problem!”

“Sheesh, looks like Akamatsu and I missed out on an eventful wake up call,” Ryoma says. “I’m surprised you didn’t wake anyone else up.”

“Oh, you’re right,” Kaito blinks. “Is no one else up?”

“Nope, just been the two of us,” Ryoma answers.

“Oh really?” Rantaro pauses. “Then again, I’ll be surprised if either Shirogane or Angie show their faces today.”

“Does Kiibo even sleep?” Kaede wonders. “Maybe he charges himself?”

“Yeah, he does,” Ryoma answers. “He told me a couple of days ago when I asked him. He seemed pretty excited to show me how his charging process works too. Never seen someone so excited over a wall socket and plug.”

“Well it explains why he never came out to see what all the noise was then,” Rantaro says. “He probably turns himself off as he charges.”

“Enough about Kiibo!” Kaito puts a hand on his hip. “Kaede, did you even get any sleep last night? You kind of look terrible.”

“Oh, thanks,” Kaede says dryly, furiously rubbing under her eyes with the sleeve of her shirt. It obviously doesn’t make a difference but it doesn’t stop her from trying. “To be honest, I couldn’t get to sleep. That doesn’t mean I don’t have enough energy to tackle today though! I’m raring to go!”

“That relief!” Gonta smiles. “Gonta was worried Akamatsu was going to be too sad to get out of bed today! So if Akamatsu says she’s okay then Gonta is very happy!”

“You shouldn’t push yourself though,” Rantaro quietly says and Kaede can see the worry in his eyes. “No one is going to blame you if you’re not up to doing much today.”

“That’s right!” Kaito pumps one of his fists. “If you need time to rest up then go ahead, sidekick! I’ll make sure Monokuma keeps out of your way!”

Kaede smiles despite sighing on the inside. She opens her mouth to speak but she’s beaten by Ryoma. “Now hold on a second you two. If Akamatsu wants to rest then she can. Instead of presuming the worst, maybe ask her how she’s feeling instead.”

“Um...” Rantaro smiles awkwardly. “Sorry, it seems we both jumped to the wrong conclusion.”

“No, it’s fine,” Kaede reassures them both. “After all, I’d presume the same too if the same thing happened to someone else. But please don’t worry about me, I’m okay. I know that I’ve got you guys to lean on if I need anything.”

“However, Tenko also senses that Akamatsu doesn’t like to share her burdens with others, which is such a shame as there’s plenty of people who want to help her out.”

“Well of course you’ve got people to lean on!” Kaito grins happily. “Alright! If you’re truly okay then let’s get...breakfast...started...um...”

Kaede can’t help but feel pity towards Kaito as he stares at the almost empty table. It’s clear he completely forgot that it was Kirumi who made the large and delicious breakfasts each morning. The astronaut looks completely lost as he blinks.

Ryoma sighs. “There will be some rice ready in a couple of minutes. It’s nothing extravagant but it’s better than nothing.”

“R-Right...” Kaito fails to hide the disappointment in his voice as he sits down a little too heavily. “Well, at least there’s something to wait for!”

Kaede chuckles as Rantaro sits down next to her and Gonta across from Kaito. She sips on her coffee with an appreciative sigh. “Sorry if I worried you all. I know it must’ve been scary not getting a response from me.”

“Well it’s not like you could’ve heard us all the way from here,” Rantaro says before sighing. “But, um, we’re all really sorry about your door.”

“Gonta really, really sorry!” Gonta tells her. “Gonta truly no mean to break it. He just wanted to open it!”

“You guys are worrying way too much,” Kaede says. “I’ve already said it’s fine. I’ll just find somewhere else to sleep, it’s not that big a deal.”

“But ladies should always have their own privacy,” Gonta responds. “Don’t worry! Gonta find you a room to sleep in after breakfast! He check all the rooms and find the nicest one for you!”

“That’s so sweet but really-”

“Good morning everyone!”

Kiibo walks into the room, giving the door a confused look.

“Um, why is Akamatsu’s bedroom door here?” Kiibo asks. “Actually, why did someone take it in the first place?”

“It’s a long story,” Kaito sighs. “But it’s nothing for you to worry about!”

“I was more confused than worried,” Kiibo admits as he sits down. “Good morning, Akamatsu. I’m glad to see you up and about! However, there’s something I want to tell you actually but...um, on my way here I happened to spot that Monokuma’s been...destroying some things...”

“I know about Chabashira’s dojo,” Kaede tells him softly. “Thank you for thinking about me but it’s fine. I’m fine. Of course I’m upset about it but I don’t expect anything different from Monokuma.”

“He what?!” Kaito’s eyes go wide. “That asshole! Why the hell did he do that?!”

“Who knows,” Rantaro says. “I was under the impression he was only destroying the school.”

“That seems logical but it’s not like we’ll ever find out how Monokuma thinks,” Kiibo says with a dejected smile. “It seems the only thing we know about him for sure is that he greatly enjoys making people suffer.”

“Tsk, fucking asshole bear,” Kaito grumbles. “Don’t sweat it, Kaede. You did exercises with Chabashira, right? I know the perfect spot where you can continue to do them.”

“Thanks but Hoshi already offered his lab,” Kaede responds. “I’ll probably take him up on the offer.”

“Oh? Is Hoshi going to join you in his lab?” Kaito asks as his eyes light up in delight. “Because if that’s the case-”

“I’m not playing tennis with you,” Ryoma responds bluntly as he slips away from the table. “The rice should be ready now so if you’ll excuse me.”

“Um, what’s your deal with trying to play tennis with Hoshi anyway?” Kiibo asks. “I thought he already told you that he doesn’t want to play? Why keep pestering him?”

“Because he can’t just stop playing!” Kaito insists as he slams a fist down a little too heavily onto the table. A couple pieces of cutlery rattle. “He’s the Ultimate Tennis Player whether he likes it or not! Tennis was his entire life at one point! He shouldn’t stop playing over one little mistake he made.”

“Murder isn’t a mistake,” Kiibo points out very quietly. “And it was his choice to stop playing. I fail to see why you don’t respect that.”

“Because he’s better than this,” Kaito grumbles, crossing his arms like a sulking child.

Kaede can feel an awkward tension begin to grow and waves her hands frantically as she tries to fix the situation. “S-So, um, Kiibo! Did you see anyone else on your way here? We’re still missing a couple of people.”

“No,” Kiibo answers. “So I’m going to presume Shinguji, Haru, um, Shirogane and Angie are still in their rooms. Would you like me to go and get them?”

Kaede shakes her head. “They’ll come in their own time. I-I just thought I’d ask.”

There’s a small part of her that dreads the idea of Angie walking through the door at the moment. Honestly, she has no clue how she’d react. She never even knew she was capable of being as angry as she was last night. Kaede looks down at the hand she had used to slap Angie and winces. Despite the entire situation that really wasn’t cool of her, was it? Kaede sighs.

Ryoma re-enters the dining hall with a large pot of fluffy, white rice that makes Kaede drool a little. He places it in the centre of the table and Kaede watches as steam slowly rises from it. Despite the simplicity of breakfast just being rice, Kaede flushes when her stomach lets out a large growl.

“Dig in,” Ryoma prompts as he gestures to the bowls that have been on the table the entire time.

Kaede eagerly dives forwards and piles her bowl up high, not feeling too guilty since Ryoma has made loads. She goes to shovel her first mouthful into her mouth when she pauses and lowers her spoon, earning a couple of raised eyebrows.

“Is something wrong?” Rantaro asks.

“It’s just...” Kaede frowns before pushing her own bowl away and grabbing two more from the pile, filling them both up as high as possible. “Shinguji is probably going to join us soon but I doubt Angie or Shirogane will. They need to eat too.”

“Are you heading to the dormitories now?” Rantaro asks. “Do you want me to join you?”

“Nuh uh.” Kaede shakes her head before standing up, holding a bowl in each hand. “I’ll only be just a second. You guys keep eating. I don’t plan on taking too long. Hopefully I’ll bring Shinguji back with me if he’s awake.”

She leaves the dining room before anyone else can question her, using her shoulders to push open doors. There’s a couple of close calls with the rice as she almost drops the bowls a couple of times. However, she eventually makes it to the dorms without spilling too much rice.

Hesitantly, she looks between the two doors she needs to knock on and sighs, heading to Tsumugi’s first. She places the bowl on the ground in front of the door before knocking on the door carefully.

“Good morning, Shirogane. It’s me,” Kaede calls through the door. She licks her lips. “I left you some breakfast just outside of your door since I wasn’t sure if you wanted to join everyone else or not. Y-You’re welcome to, of course. Just...”

She bites the inside of her mouth.

“I hope you’re okay after yesterday,” she says. “What happened...wasn’t your fault.”

Kaede turns to Angie’s door next and places down the second bowl.

“Angie, I left you some breakfast outside of your door,” Kaede says loud enough so Angie should hear if she’s awake. “I’m not sure how you’re feeling right now but you still need to eat. It’ll be dangerous to let yourself go hungry in a situation like this.”

The pianist pauses before sighing.

“I don’t think I can forgive you right now,” Kaede continues. “Or maybe I’ll never forgive you. But nothing has changed either. Both you and Shirogane are a part of the group despite everything. I’d be really sad if either of you died.”

Kaede spins around and almost shrieks when she notices Korekiyo standing right behind her. She puts a hand to her chest and laughs nervously.

“S-Shinguji! I didn’t know you were there,” Kaede mumbles as she takes a step back.

Korekiyo blinks before his mask twitches. “My apologies, it wasn’t my intention to scare you. However, I was leaving my room when I heard you talking to both Shirogane and Angie. I must say you do have a way with words.”

“Um, thanks I guess?” Kaede rubs her cheek with a finger bashfully. “I thought they just needed to hear some things before I went back to eat my breakfast. Hoshi made everyone rice, by the way.”

“Ah, I see,” Korekiyo says as he closes his eyes. “Hoshi has taken over Tojo’s duties. How kind of him.”

“We shouldn’t rely on him every morning,” Kaede points out as the two leave the dorms. “Anyway, why are you up so late? I thought you wake up earlier than this.”

“Oh, I’ve been awake,” Korekiyo tells her. “I was simply getting ready. Putting my uniform on takes a long time, you see. I must admit I awoke much later than I usually do but I didn’t exactly sleep well last night.”

“You too, huh?” Kaede gives him an empathetic smile. “Yeah, I don’t think I even slept a wink.”

“That’s certainly not surprising,” Korekiyo responds. “You dealt with a lot last night.”

“Yeah, well, I’m doing a little better this morning,” Kaede says as she pumps her fists. Her happiness is short-lived when Korekiyo gives her a curious look. “Um, is everything okay?”

“My apologies if this sounds strange but I had this unsettling realisation last night,” Korekiyo says. “There’s not many girls left.”

“Oh, you’re right,” Kaede says in realisation. There’s only her, Angie and Tsumugi representing the girls now. She swallows. “It’s kind of sad, isn’t it? If the graduated students were here then there would’ve been eight girls. Now there’s only three.”

“Indeed, it is very sad,” Korekiyo muses before opening the door for the school. “Ah, ladies first.”

“Thanks!”

Korekiyo puts his hands behind his back as he walks. “I must admit I’ve been very confused about how to think about you, Akamatsu. When we first arrived here Monokuma claimed you were a threat yet I’ve not found any proof of that.”

Kaede grimaces. “I don’t like to think that I’m a threat....”

“I’ve reached the conclusion that Monokuma must’ve just been lying,” Korekiyo tells her. “Because if he’s right then...”

Kaede raises an eyebrow as they reach the dining room and they head inside together. She instantly

dashes towards her bowl of rice and digs in quickly, amazed at how light and fluffy each grain is.

“Oh wow! This ish delishush!” Kaede declares before swallowing. “What’s your secret?”

Ryoma shrugs. “No secrets. I just cook how I’m supposed to.”

“Gonta bets Hoshi cooks with love!” Gonta says. “Gonta can always tell when food been cooked with love because it always taste extra tasty! Just like this rice!”

Ryoma tugs his hat to cover his face. “I promise I just cooked it normally…”

Kaede hums to herself as she eats, glancing around the room at everyone once in a while. Her hand slows down as her spoon reaches her mouth. Kaede pauses as she realises that something is rather...odd.

“What’s up?” Rantaro asks. “Are you full?”

“No,” Kaede answers. “It’s just that there seems to be something off.”

“Did you notice something?” Kaito asks.

Kaede’s eyes suddenly go wide. “I’m the only girl in here!”

“We were discussing how there’s only three girls left moments ago,” Korekiyo points out and Kaede suddenly feels very stupid.

“Y-Yeah but…” Kaede droops. “It just feels kind of weird.”

“The lack of girls here isn’t making you uncomfortable, is it?” Kiibo asks curiously. “I didn’t think you’d be the type of person who would be bothered by such a thing.”

“I’m not!” Kaede insists. “But it’s like I said, it just feels super weird. I almost feel like I’m the only girl left on the planet.”

“That’s certainly not the case,” Korekiyo says. “Both Angie and Shirogane are still around.”

“Yes but…” Kaede sighs as she runs a hand down her face. “It doesn’t matter. It’s not a big deal, you guys! I just realised that I’m the only girl in here this morning and thought it was kinda strange in a way.”

“Think about how I feel,” Kiibo says. “I’m the only robot here and I don’t find it weird. Should I find it weird?”

“No!” Kaito answers. “You’re one of us and that’s all that matters!”

“M-Momota!” Kiibo’s eyes suddenly go very watery and Kaede feels startled. “That might be the nicest thing someone has ever said to me!”

“C-Chill out, dude. There’s no need to make a big deal out of it!” Kaito nervously goes back to eating as Kiibo blubbers.

Life feels like it’s been sucked out of the room when Monokuma makes his usual appearance. Kaede glares at her rice as she hears him enter the room and for a moment she’s glad she has her back turned to the door.

“Good morning my wonderful students!” Monokuma cheers. “What a beautiful day! Although, I

don't like things to be too perfect. It would make me feel a little...*sick-le*."

No one laughs. Kaede grits her teeth and continues to eat. She doesn't even want to give Monokuma the satisfaction of losing her cool and starting a screaming match, even though she desperately wants to give him a piece of her mind.

"Wow, tough crowd," Monokuma comments. "Don't tell me you're all...*crushed* over yesterday?"

Once again, no one laughs. It seems everyone has the exact same idea of completely ignoring the black and white bear.

"C'mon, don't all *stampede* at once to get my attention!" Monokuma laughs before sighing.

"Actually, that was really bad. No one laugh at that one."

Funnily enough, Monokuma, no one is laughing at you. The sooner you go away, the better. I'm not up to dealing with you and your bullshit today.

"C'mon guys!" Monokuma waddles forward. "There's ghosting and then there's just being plain old rude! I don't know why you're all so upset with me! I'm simply just doing my job, you know? It's not like I had any say in what happened yesterday. I didn't ask Tojo to kill Chabashira!"

"Hey, Gonta? Can you pass me the sugar?" Kaede asks as she reaches out her hand expectantly. "Please?"

"O-Oh! Gonta can do that!" Gonta happily passes her the metal bowl.

"Thanks."

"Hey! Don't pretend like I'm not here!" Monokuma's voice gets a little louder. "How rude! Here I was ready to congratulate you all for surviving so long but if you're all just going to be mean then maybe I won't!"

"Do you guys...do you guys hear something?" Kaede asks before shrugging. "It might just be me."

"Probably just the wind," Ryoma tells her. "Seconds?"

"Oh yes please."

"There's not even any wind here!" Monokuma points out. "Are you guys broken?! Did something else go wrong? I mean, I know things have been off ever since three of you magically disappeared the first day we got here but this is just getting ridiculous now!"

Kaede's ears perk up but she restrains herself.

"Akamatsu, I was actually meaning to ask you something!" Kiibo says. He clasps his hands together. "I need your help with something and I think you're the only person here who can help me!"

"Oh?" Kaede blinks before smiling. "Is something the matter?"

"It's nothing serious," Kiibo admits. "But I've been thinking...will you give me music lessons?"

"Music lessons?" Kaede pauses. "I-I mean why-"

"I want to become a pop star," Kiibo tells her. "I've been waiting for days to ask you for help but you've always been busy. And maybe it'll be a good distraction! I'm not expecting too much, of

course! I simply thought you could help me write a song to sing and maybe you could compose it!”

The request practically comes out of nowhere but Kaede has this small feeling that perhaps Kiibo isn’t the best at reading rooms. He probably took the silence as something awkward and is trying to fix it. Kaede smiles. “Yeah, that sounds fun actually!”

Ryoma clears his throat. “You’ll probably have to play the piano, Akamatsu.”

“Ah...” Kaede fiddles with her spoon. “Maybe this will be a good chance to find out if I can still play or not.”

“Did something happen?” Rantaro asks curiously.

“Oh, it’s nothing serious,” Kaede says. “Just, ah, something happened a couple of days ago when I was playing the piano and I’ve been a little wary of playing it ever since. However, if I’m just helping Kiibo make a song then...”

“Please don’t play it if it’s going to cause you distress,” Kiibo says nervously. “Even helping write song lyrics is enough.”

“It’s not a problem, Kiibo! I’m actually really excited to do something fun for a change!” Kaede insists as she pumps a fist. “How about we meet in the piano room after breakfast? I want to go into my room first to sort something out then-”

“Why are you all acting like I’m not here?!” Monokuma shrieks, climbing up on the table. “I’m the headmaster and you should all treat me with respect! I know it’s fun to bully people but it’s not fun to be on the receiving end of it!”

“Actually, can Gonta join you both?” Gonta suddenly requests. “Gonta no had the chance to hear Akamatsu play piano yet and...”

“Of course you’re welcome,” Kaede says.

“This entire game is just one big joke,” Monokuma grumbles. “Less students. No respect. The wrong people are still alive...”

Kaede freezes, wincing when Monokuma looks directly at her.

“Oh? Are you going to stop pretending I’m some sort of ghost now, Miss Akamatsu?” Monokuma asks.

She swallows but before she can say anything, there’s a loud rattle as Kaito stands up a little too abruptly. “S-Shut up! Ghosts aren’t real so don’t say that sort of shit!”

“Eh?” Monokuma grins, clearly satisfied that he’s finally got someone to stop ignoring him. “But no one else can see me, Momota! I must clearly have died in my sleep and come back as a ghost! How unfortunate that you’re the only person who can see me right now! That must make you very, very haunted-”

“*Shut up!*” Kaito staggers backwards and Kaede frowns when she notices how pale the astronaut has become. “Everyone knows g-ghosts aren’t real! O-Only little kids believe in them!”

“Actually, I believe in the paranormal to some degree,” Korekiyo unhelpfully says. “Of course, there’s always been speculation whether spirits are real or not and every person has a different

opinion when it comes to believing in them or not-”

“Of course someone as weird as you believes in them!” Kaito huffs. “But they’re not real! They’re not!”

“Why are you getting so worked up over ghosts anyway?” Ryoma asks. “Are you that scared of them?”

“Of course not!”

“You’re looking very pale,” Kaede murmurs.

A trickle of sweat runs down Kaito’s face. “T-That’s because you’re all talking about made up shit!”

Kaede only notices a little too late that Monokuma has crept up behind Kaito and she reaches out to stop him. She doesn’t warn him in time and Monokuma touches the astronaut’s shoulder with a loud, “boo!”

The shriek Kaito lets out is full of so much terror that it scares Kaede momentarily, jumping as Kaito barely misses whacking Monokuma. The bear laughs at him and Kaito glares at Monokuma, hands trembling. “Y-You...”

“You’re so easy to wind up!” Monokuma giggles.

Kaede lets out an irritated sigh as she heads over to where Kaito is and puts a hand on his shoulder. “Hey, are you okay?”

“Huh?” Kaito gives her an unreadable look and Kaede frowns. He’s looking a little too pale right now. Is he really that scared? Kaede puts a hand to his forehead and gasps. “W-What are you doing?”

“You’re burning up,” Kaede murmurs. “Momota, are you sick?”

“What? No!” Kaito knocks her hand away and laughs. “As if I’d let myself get sick in a place like this! J-Just got myself a little worked up, that’s all.”

“Can’t help but notice you’re looking paler than usual,” Ryoma says with a frown. “Maybe you should go back to bed.”

“B-But-”

“Hoshi’s right! If you’re sick then it’s important to rest,” Kaede says as she hooks their arms together. “C’mon I’m not taking no for an answer! I’m going to take you to your room and then I’ll go to the piano room! You might have to wait a little longer though, is that okay, Kiibo?”

“Of course!” Kiibo smiles. “Momota’s health comes first before anything else!”

“Seriously, I’m fine!” Kaito insists, groaning when Kaede all but pulls him through the door. She does, however, make sure to give Monokuma a nasty glare before she leaves. She turns her head when Monokuma giggles. It’s one of those giggles he lets out before something bad happens. Kaede’s scowl deepens.

Kaito gives up complaining when they reach the dormitories and Kaede smiles softly when she notices that at least Tsumugi has taken her food into her room. She marches him to his bedroom

door and puts her hands on her hips.

“Listen, I’m not sure what’s wrong with you now,” Kaede says. “For all we know you might not even be sick but you do look really pale and feel warm.”

“I’m fine,” Kaito repeats himself. “Seriously...”

“Even if that is the case can you at least get some rest? For me at least?” Kaede asks. “I’ll be happy if you rest now so you can feel better later.”

Kaito sighs heavily. “Fine, fine...” He opens his bedroom door. “But the only reason I look so rough right now is because of Monokuma, you know? Ghosts and shit...really scare me.”

Kaede squeezes his arm with a comforting smile. “It’s okay, everyone has something they’re scared of. No one’s going to judge you for being scared, especially since it was Monokuma who was the one who was trying to upset you.”

“Trying? He succeeded,” Kaito grumbles before giving Kaede a thumbs up. “But if my sidekick will feel better if I rest for a little bit then I guess I could do with a nap. Just make sure I don’t sleep through lunch, okay?”

“I promise I’ll wake you for lunch,” Kaede giggles. “Now rest!”

Kaede lets out a soft sigh as Kaito finally heads into his room. She pauses before deciding to head into Kokichi’s room for some privacy quickly. After all, she still wants to take a look at Rantaro’s tablet. He probably wants it back soon.

Something catches her eye however and she spins around to spot Tsumugi’s bedroom door is slightly open. The assassin has an empty bowl in her hands and she shrinks in on herself when she realises Kaede has spotted her.

Kaede hesitates before raising her hand and giving Tsumugi a wave. Tsumugi is clearly surprised but a second later she sheepishly waves back, wearing an awkward smile. Kaede smiles too.

“I-I’ll see you later, Akamatsu?” Tsumugi says, although it comes out more as a question.

Kaede nods. “Yeah, I’ll see you later too.”

Rantaro’s tablet is actually a survivor’s perk, Kaede finds out. She’s sitting on Kokichi’s bed, legs gently kicking against the side of it.

The tablet includes a map of the entire school and a clue. Kaede swallows as she reads through the clue quietly.

“The mastermind who is behind the killing game is hiding somewhere within the academy...”

Kaede murmurs to herself softly. “Your best chance of exposing them is when Monokuma needs a spare.”

She continues to read through the clue, muttering to herself the entire time. A wave of nausea hits her when she reaches the last two lines.

“Only share this information with people you know you can trust. How you determine that will mean your life and your death...”

The fact that he's letting me read this...Rantaro must really want to trust me. If I woke up with this on my tablet then I wouldn't know what to do. Everything that he's done up until now, going to the library, taking the ticket, keeping quiet about stealing it...this tablet explains everything. I was never completely certain there was a mastermind, hell, I was hoping there wasn't one but this clue is concrete evidence that there is one and Rantaro is hell bent on finding them.

Of course Kaede has so many questions she wants to ask him, the first one being what the heck a survivor's perk is anyway. However, she needs to save those questions for later. As desperate as she is to talk to Rantaro right now, she really should just give him his tablet back, find Kiibo and then talk to Rantaro later.

She locks up Kokichi's room and finds Rantaro in his own. She passes him back his tablet with a determined smile.

"Thanks for letting me borrow it," Kaede says. "As soon as I'm done with Kiibo, let's meet in Ouma's room. I have a lot of things I need to talk to you about and something very important to show you."

Rantaro doesn't say anything for a moment before giving the pianist a lopsided grin. "Sure. Thanks for giving me my tablet back. I hope you have fun with Kiibo and Gonta."

Kiibo and Gonta are waiting for her in the piano room. She licks her lips as she steps inside, giving the piano a longing look as she approaches it tentatively.

"Is Momota feeling better?" Gonta asks. He's standing by the wall full of discs and tapes. Kaede notices that he looks a little nervous. Maybe he's worried about stepping on something important?

Kaede nods. "Yep, I think Monokuma just upset him a little too much. All he needs is a nap and he'll be back to normal!"

"That's a relief," Kiibo says. "For a moment I was starting to get worried."

"Don't worry, you guys! Momota will be fine!" Kaede says. "But how about we don't mention ghosts around him ever again? I think he's really scared of them."

"I fail to see how he's scared of ghosts. There's no scientific reason for them to exist," Kiibo responds. "Once someone dies that's it, correct? It's not as if there's something inside of everyone controlling their bodies, right? I know I certainly don't have something controlling me."

"Oh?" Kaede tilts her head to the side. "Then how do you work?"

"I'm the most advanced and developed AI to ever exist," Kiibo tells her proudly. "My professor made sure I would have free will when creating me. Yes, whilst it is true that previously made robots were controlled with a remote of some sorts, I have no need for that! Fufufu! I am capable of creating my own thoughts just like the rest of you! I'm not so different so...please don't treat me like I am."

"I-I would never!" Kaede promises him. "I've never really been good with technology though so I really have no clue how you even work to be honest. Still, it's nice to get to know you a little better!"

"Please don't think of me as just a piece of technology," Kiibo says. "I am much more than that! If I had an actual human body then I would be the exact same as the rest of you!"

“But Kiibo Ultimate Robot!” Gonta points out. “Does Kiibo not like his talent?”

“O-Of course I do!” Kiibo says. “The professor put a lot of work into creating me! I’m practically his child!”

“Is that how it works?” Kaede ponders.

“Gonta thinks he understands!” Gonta says. “Gonta was brought up by wolves! Gonta knows wolves weren’t his actual parents but Gonta felt close to them anyway!”

“Hold on a second, you were brought up by wolves?!” Kaede puts a hand to her head. “Why?”

“Gonta got lost in forest one day and separated from his actual family,” Gonta explains. “Gonta sad for a while but then wolves find him and adopt him into their pack! So even though Gonta lost one family he found another one to look after him!”

“That’s really…” Kaede finds the right word to say. “Fascinating!”

“Family can be whoever you want it to be,” Gonta says. “So if Kiibo’s professor sees him as son then that’s okay! Gonta sees wolves as parents and that’s okay too!”

“Wow, you really do get it!” Kiibo’s eyes go wide. “Although, um, how were you not eaten whilst living in the forest? I’m surprised the wolves took you in instead of killing you. They are a predatory type of animal, after all.”

Gonta shrugs. “Gonta truly not know but Gonta doesn’t really think too much about it!”

“That’s probably for the best,” Kaede agrees. “Now! You wanted to create a song right, Kiibo?”

“Oh yes!” Kiibo clasps his hands together. Kaede doesn’t think she’s seen him so excited before. “Do you really think you could help me, Akamatsu? Even if it’s just one song then I’ll be more than pleased!”

“I didn’t know you were so passionate about music,” Kaede admits.

“Well, it’s more so I want to show off my abilities as a robot,” Kiibo says. “Nothing is going to change the fact that I’m a robot but I do want to show everyone that robots can be just like everyone else! After analysing a couple of options I decided I want to advance in the pop music genre!”

“I…see,” Kaede says slowly. “So it’s not that you’re passionate about music, it’s that you want to prove yourself?”

“Exactly!” Kiibo puts his hands to his hips proudly. “I have also found out that music can make people happy, yes? I might not have the best understanding of what happiness truly is but I do want to learn! Whilst I could very easily download music and lyrics to sing, writing something of my own is a much better experience!”

“So that’s why you want my help!” Kaede pumps a fist. “Alright then! Let’s do this, Kiibo!”

“Gonta help too!” Gonta adds. “Gonta really hopes that Kiibo’s music career is very successful! Maybe Gonta can even help with writing lyrics too?!”

“M-Maybe,” Kaede says nervously. She takes a seat in front of her piano and looks down at the keys. “...how about we decide what type of song you want to write first before anything else?”

“Oh, that’s easy!” Kiibo tells her. “I want to write a pop song that inspires others! I want people to feel hopeful when they hear my music!”

“As inspiring as that is...that’s kind of vague,” Kaede says. “Maybe there’s a certain, like, something you want to sing about?”

“Hmm...” Kiibo puts a hand to his chin. “This is a lot harder than I anticipated it to be.”

“Gonta knows! Maybe Kiibo sing song about what makes him happy!” Gonta suggests.

Kaede nods eagerly. “That’s a great idea! What makes you really happy, Kiibo?”

“I really like volts,” Kiibo says with a nod of his head. “100-240 volts to be exact.”

“Um...” Kaede pauses. “Okay...”

“What is a volt?” Gonta asks.

Kaede ends up asking Kiibo to think of something else, much to the robot’s dismay. After a lengthy discussion, Kiibo reveals he likes plants. Kaede clings onto that very quickly. Despite the...unusual topic, writing a song about plants might be easier than writing one on volts.

“Kiibo, can you sing a little for me before we start?” Kaede asks. “It’ll be easier for me to create a tune for you that way. I don’t want to make the pitch too low or high.”

“Fufufu, that’s no problem!” Kiibo says proudly.

“I’ll try to play along with your voice!” Kaede tells him. “I want you to go as low as you can and then go higher! That way I’ll be able to match the keys to your singing.”

“Gonta so excited for this!” Gonta cheers.

Kaede closes her eyes and inhales through her nose before pressing down gently on a piano key at the same time as Kiibo opens his mouth.

“AA!”

Her hands slip instantly and she ends up slamming her hands down onto several piano keys, creating an awful noise. However, it’s nowhere near as bad as the sound coming from Kiibo’s mouth. Kaede can only stare at the robot in horror, completely missing Gonta’s terrified expression.

Kiibo soon catches on that Kaede has stopped a couple of seconds later and gives her a confused look. “Um, is something wrong?”

“What was that horrible noise?!” Gonta cries out in fear. “It made Gonta feel like his entire body was going to break!”

“Gonta...” Kiibo frowns and Kaede suddenly feels sad for Kiibo. “Why would you say such a thing about Akamatsu’s piano playing?”

“Huh?!” Kaede blinks. “You thought he was on about *me*?!”

“Well it couldn’t have been anything else,” Kiibo responds with a large shrug.

Kaede growls. “He was on about your...singing!”

Kiibo throws his hands up in the air in shock. “W-What?!”

“Gonta sorry but he don’t think he can listen to such a sound ever again!” Gonta whimpers, clenching a fist tightly. “Not even animals could make noise like that!”

“I-I don’t understand,” Kiibo murmurs. “I surely couldn’t have been that bad, right?”

Kaede sighs as she turns away from her piano and puts her hands into her lap. “Kiibo, I’m sorry but maybe music isn’t the way forward for you...”

“B-But becoming a pop star is the best career choice for me!” Kiibo insists. “I even have an audio recording function that’ll help me record songs right away!”

“Even if you are equipped for making music doesn’t mean you should be a pop star,” Kaede tells him softly. “Don’t worry, there’s plenty of other opportunities for you-”

“But I was really excited to become the first robot pop star,” Kiibo says as he droops. “S-Surely I can’t be that bad, right? I’ll just rewind my audio and...listen...to my singing?”

“What’s wrong?” Kaede asks.

“That’s strange,” Kiibo says. “I shouldn’t have much saved seeing as the professor changed my tape only recently yet it seems I have days, no, *weeks* worth of audio recorded. It isn’t a problem as the tape should last a while but...”

“Huh? That really is strange,” Kaede comments. “Hey, maybe you should play something from it? Maybe it might explain something?”

“That’s probably the most logical conclusion,” Kiibo agrees. He puts a hand up to his head and twists a circular mechanical looking part before pressing it down.

“Is this your doing, Ouma? Did you have Gonta kidnap us?”

Huh?!

“Nishishi! He’s so simple minded! As soon as I told him that everyone who hates bugs was trying to get rid of them...”

That’s Kokichi’s voice! But who was the other guy? I don’t recognise his voice...

“Huh? Gonta kidnap people?” Gonta stares at Kiibo with horror. “Gonta sorry! Gonta no mean-”

“When did this happen?” Kaede asks with wide eyes. “Because that conversation we just heard...when did that happen?”

“I have no memory of recording it,” Kiibo adds. “However, I seem to have hours and hours worth of stuff saved. Additionally, I would’ve remembered if I was kidnapped by Gonta and...”

“Gonta no kidnap anyone! Gonta promise!” Gonta looks like he’s seconds away from crying, clearly distraught that someone would say such a thing about him. “Gonta didn’t even spend much time with Ouma here! But is what he saying right? People hate bugs?!”

“I don’t think that’s what is important right now,” Kaede tells him gently. “Kiibo...why do you have so much recorded? Are you sure you don’t remember anything?”

“Um, even I would remember being kidnapped,” Kiibo says. “I’m telling the truth, Akamatsu. I

have no idea about any of this. Even if I did record this conversation somehow I don't remember it at all."

"That's concerning," Kaede murmurs. "Hey, Kiibo. You said there was lots of it, right?"

"That's right," Kiibo says. "I can't give an exact number but there's at least over one hundred hours worth of audio in my system."

"Over *one hundred* hours?!" Kaede blanches. "Is there any way of listening to it all at once?"

"Of course not, that would be completely unreasonable," Kiibo says with a frown. "Whilst I do have the audio saved I'll have to listen to it manually. However, I can put the audio onto a tape! I have a couple of tapes inside of me but they only fit a couple of minutes worth of recording onto them and I don't have many in the first place. I only use the tapes sparingly."

"I see..." Kaede swallows heavily. "Kiibo, I think your audio recordings are very important. How often do you record though?"

"I'm always recording!" Kiibo says. "Just in case someone says a robophobic remark! Then I'll have evidence to use when I take them to court!"

"Y-You've been recording us all this entire time?!" Kaede sweats. "That's sort of unsettling to be honest..."

"I-I don't do it in a creepy sort of way!" Kiibo insists. "I rarely listen to the recordings anyway! I-I didn't even know about the mysterious recording up until now!"

"Recording included Ouma and someone else," Gonta says. "Gonta wonders when this was recorded..."

"Kiibo had to have been there too to have recorded it," Kaede says. "Yet Kiibo doesn't remember a thing..."

"Um, don't look at me like I'm suspicious!" Kiibo argues as he thrusts a finger in Kaede's direction. "I am just as confused as you are! I woke up at the same time as everyone else here! This recording shouldn't exist!"

"Yet it does..." Kaede murmurs. "Hours and hours of it too..."

"What do this mean?" Gonta wonders. "Have we been here before?"

"If we have been here before then I certainly don't remember any of it," Kiibo says. "Although, if that is the case then that whiteboard Ouma created when we first got here..."

"Makes a lot more sense, yeah," Kaede murmurs with a grimace.

"Perhaps it's too soon to jump to a conclusion," Kiibo says. "However, I think it's for the best if I listened to the audio. Maybe it might explain something or at least help us in some sort of way. The voice we didn't recognise...perhaps I can figure out who it belongs to."

"How long would it take you to listen to everything?" Kaede asks.

"Um, weren't you listening earlier?" Kiibo asks. "I'll have to listen to everything manually. If I want to listen to literally everything then it'll take me hours. However, I can fast forward through the audio but that also means I might miss something important too..."

Kaede bites her lip. "Ah..."

"Furthermore, I'll be left...vulnerable whilst listening to the recording," Kiibo reveals nervously. "I won't be able to do much whilst listening to it. Listening to the audio takes up a lot of concentration, which means I won't be able to move whilst I listen. A-And my battery life depletes quicker too and I can't listen whilst charging since I turn off."

For the Ultimate Robot your abilities aren't actually that good. However, it seems I've accidentally found even more evidence that we've been here before. That's good but since Kiibo is literally the evidence...hmm. But he might have a recording of something that might help expose who the mastermind is! Or at the very least something really important!

"I would like to go through the audio but..." Kiibo sighs. "I don't think it's safe for me to in a situation like this."

"A-Actually, I have the perfect room for you to use that'll keep you safe!" Kaede reveals. She swallows. It's all or nothing at this point. Kaede is desperate for any sort of evidence that'll help get everyone out of here. If trusting Kiibo with everything she knows will help everyone then...

"Oh?" Kiibo blinks. "Where?"

"That's..." Kaede looks at Gonta. "Um..."

"Oh, Gonta get it!" Gonta's eyes widen in realisation. "The less people who know where Kiibo is, the safer he is! Gonta leave so he doesn't hear where Kiibo go to hide!"

Kaede slumps forward in relief as Gonta leaves without any hassle, although a small part of her feels guilty for wanting him gone. "Kiibo, there's something important I have to tell you and it might explain that really long recording you have."

"Is that so?" Kiibo says. "Then please fill me in then. The sooner I'm up to date on everything, the better."

She looks at the door and then back at Kiibo before leaning in close. "Kiibo, I don't think it's our first time here."

"That's only logical after hearing what we heard," Kiibo says with a frown. "But why the secrecy? I don't understand. Wouldn't everyone knowing about this be more beneficial? D-Do you know something everyone else doesn't?!"

"I-It's really complicated!" Kaede fires back before sighing. "The only reason I haven't told anyone about my theory is because I don't want to scare people and there's no point worrying everyone if I was wrong."

"But there's now evidence to say you're right," Kiibo says. "Akamatsu, I'm failing to understand you."

"It's..." Kaede clenches her fists in her lap. "Kiibo, there's someone here who is really dangerous too, one of us. They'll do anything to sabotage the game. If they find out I know too much then..."

"How do you know if that's the case?"

"Because, I've got evidence. I've seen the evidence," Kaede says. "Kiibo, this is really serious."

"Of course I know it's serious," Kiibo says. "But I'm failing to understand why you want to hide

the fact we've clearly been here before and don't remember. The...dangerous person won't target you if everyone knows, right?"

"I can't risk everyone's safety!" Kaede retorts. "A-And I didn't want to believe the fact that we've been here before because...because if it was true then it would mean I tried to do something horrible!"

Kiibo stares at her silently before frowning. "You're referring to the whiteboard Ouma and Monokuma made, yes?"

Kaede nods.

"Seeing myself be put in the dangerous group...made me feel uncomfortable," Kiibo admits. "However, despite what had happened I know deep down I wouldn't have done something bad without a reason. I don't think you would've done something as malicious as try to kill someone without a reason, Akamatsu."

"It still hurts knowing that I tried to though," Kaede says quietly.

"I might not understand how you're feeling but I do understand the difference between right and wrong," Kiibo says. "Even if you did do something bad the last time we were here, you've done nothing but help everyone this time around. I can't fault anything about you other than the fact you're hiding things from people."

"It's for a good reason, I promise," Kaede promises. "When the time is right I intend to tell everyone what I know. However, until then I would appreciate it if you didn't say anything to anyone else."

Kiibo sighs and Kaede sucks in a breath. "...very well. I won't tell anyone about my mysterious audio or that you know so much. However, I am curious about where you want me to go. Do you actually have a safe place for me to go to?"

"Yep!" Kaede says and pulls out Kokichi's bedroom key from under her vest. "I know somewhere very safe."

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 3 Part 2

Chapter Notes

Hello! :) I'm trying to update more regularly so here's a new chapter! I hope you all enjoy!

Thank you for the comments on the previous chapter!!! They mean a lot :)

Rantaro raises an eyebrow when Kaede turns up to Kokichi's room with Kiibo. She sends him a look that basically says 'I'll explain later' before unlocking the bedroom door.

"Akamatsu? Why do you have Ouma's bedroom door key?" Kiibo asks curiously as he steps inside. His eyes go wide. "Why is his room so messy? It's a little disrespectful to mess up a deceased person's room, you know?"

"It's always been like this," Kaede says. "Ignore the mess for now, move out the way so I can lock the door please."

She's not surprised when Rantaro follows her as Kiibo explores the room, heading over to the whiteboard and looking at it with a frown. "Hey, Akamatsu? Why did you bring Kiibo with you?"

Kaede lowers her voice. "He was showing us his audio recording function when we found out he had weeks worth of audio saved. We heard a conversation between Ouma and another person who might be one of the graduated students. Listen, I know that trusting people is really difficult for you but in a situation like this..."

"...you said he had weeks worth of audio saved?" Rantaro asks before sighing. "So does this mean we truly have been here before?"

Kaede nods with a grimace. "Yeah, I'm fairly certain at this point. I'm not sure what this means but the plan is for Kiibo to listen to the audio and try to find something that'll help us get out of here. I'm not sure what he has recorded but anything is useful at this point."

Rantaro looks at Kiibo quietly. The robot has moved on from the whiteboard to start examining some of the cardboard boxes. "Then I guess this means we have no choice but to trust him. But Akamatsu, what if he's...you know?"

"The mastermind?" Kaede whispers, flinching when Kiibo reaches down to pick up a piece of paper. "It's a possibility but Kiibo himself said he doesn't remember recording the conversation we heard. B-Besides, if he is the mastermind then I don't think he'd willingly offer to listen to everything."

"...still, it's probably for the best if we keep an eye on him," Rantaro says. "I just hope he doesn't destroy anything in this room. Everything is important."

"Um, what are you guys whispering about?" Kiibo asks suddenly and pouts. "My hearing isn't very advanced so you'll have to speak up if you want to talk to me. U-Unless you were both talking about me?"

“No, no!” Kaede waves her hands nervously. “That’s not it at all! Amami and I were just...”

“Discussing something private,” Rantaro finishes for her. He leans forward and puts a hand to his chin. “So, what brings you here, Kiibo?”

Kiibo sticks a finger up in the air as he explains. “Well you see, it turns out I have several hundred hours worth of audio saved on my tape that I had no idea about. Akamatsu and I agreed that it would be beneficial to listen to everything as it might help us find a way out of here. Additionally, there was a voice neither of us recognised on the tape and I would like to try and figure out who the owner is!”

“I...see,” Rantaro says before pausing. “How long will this take?”

“Days?” Kiibo suggests. “Weeks perhaps. I do have to listen to everything manually and will have to fast forward a lot of the audio. Unfortunately there is a chance that I’ll miss something important but I do think the benefits of getting through the tape quicker outweighs the negatives. I’m, um, rather vulnerable whilst listening to the audio as I can’t move and run out of battery quicker which is why Akamatsu said she’d take me somewhere safe.”

“So that’s why you’re here,” Rantaro says before smiling. “Ouma’s room is pretty safe since only Akamatsu can unlock the door.”

“If you don’t mind me asking, why are you here, Amami?” Kiibo suddenly asks. “I still don’t understand how Akamatsu has access to this room so the fact you’re here too is very confusing.”

“Ouma gave me his bedroom key when he was...” Kaede hesitates. “Dying. Obviously because of the situation he couldn’t actually tell me why he wanted me to have it but...”

“I see, that does explain why you’re here,” Kiibo says to Kaede. “But Amami?”

“She let me come in,” Rantaro says. “Look around you, Kiibo. There’s a lot of things in here that don’t make sense. There’s simply too much in here for one person to go through, right?”

“R-Right...” Kiibo pauses. “Um, Amami? Have I done something to offend you? You’re...acting a little standoffish.”

“Am I?” Rantaro blinks before smiling awkwardly. “Ah, sorry. I’m simply a little tense at the moment. I wasn’t expecting Akamatsu to bring someone with her today if I’m being completely honest.”

“Do you not like me because...” Kiibo frowns. “Because I’m a robot, right?! Is that why you don’t like me?”

“I-I never said I didn’t like you!” Rantaro panics and helplessly looks at Kaede, clearly wanting her help.

The pianist sighs. “Kiibo, you’ve got the wrong idea! Amami doesn’t hate you! I told him earlier to meet me here and he just didn’t expect anyone else to be with me! You just surprised him, that’s all!”

“I-Is that so?” Kiibo murmurs. “It seems I got the wrong end of the stick then. I was simply under the impression that Akamatsu hadn’t told anyone else about what she told me earlier.”

“Oh?” Rantaro crosses his arms. “And what was that?”

Kaede counts her blessings that she's been open with Rantaro for a while because Kiibo doesn't even hesitate as he says, "well she told me she thinks this isn't our first time here! I'm starting to believe that may be true considering the mysterious recording I have. Actually, Amami, what do you think about keeping it a secret? I fail to see the point of hiding this theory from everyone."

"There's no point causing panic, right?" Rantaro says.

"That's what Akamatsu said too..." Kiibo mutters. "My apologies, as advanced as I am as an AI it seems I'll never fully grasp the understanding of human emotions. I always choose the most logical answer when it comes to solving problems. I simply don't understand how emotions can cause such hassle."

"Kiibo..." Kaede murmurs and gently clasps his hands. Kiibo's eyes go wide. "You don't need to apologise! Even if your way of thinking is different to ours you still want to help everyone! That makes you instantly better than at least most of the population!"

"Akamatsu, you're too kind!" Kiibo starts to blubber.

Rantaro raises an even higher eyebrow than before before clearing his throat. "So, Kiibo. About the recording you have..."

"Oh, that's right!" Kiibo lets go of Kaede's hands and grins proudly. "It's probably better if I start listening to it sooner rather than later! If it's okay with both of you I would like to stay in this room whilst listening to ensure my safety."

"That's the whole reason I brought you here!" Kaede sighs. "At least we're both on the same page..."

"It's probably for the best if one of us stays in the room with you though," Rantaro suddenly says, looking scarily serious. "After all, it would be a shame if something were to happen to you."

"...as ominous as that does sound, Akamatsu did mention that there's also a dangerous person at the school too, right?" Kiibo says nervously. "That's what you're getting at, right?"

"Amami is just being cautious!" Kaede says before sending a pointed glare at the green haired male. "But that's right, there is someone dangerous here and I don't want to scare you Kiibo but..."

"Having one of us around at all times means you'll be protected," Rantaro explains. "Your safety comes first. You said you're going to be vulnerable when listening to your audio, right? I know it's not much but it's probably for the best if either Akamatsu or I stay around when you are listening."

"I see. Yes, that does make sense," Kiibo agrees. "However I must ask how both of you actually know about this so-called dangerous person?" He rolls his eyes. "I simply thought Shirogane was going to be the only threat here."

"Everyone here is a threat, Kiibo," Rantaro says and Kaede winces at how easily he can say such a thing. "But there's one person here who trumps everyone else. There's someone who, well, wants this killing game to succeed."

"Huh? You're not serious are you?" Kiibo stammers. "Only Monokuma wants this game, right?"

Rantaro shakes his head. "No, there's someone here, someone probably among us who wants this game too. There's a chance that your mysterious recording might help us figure out who that person is."

“I-I’ve encountered this dangerous person?!” Kiibo freezes. “But everyone here seems...so nice!”

“It’s a little naïve to think that way,” Rantaro says. “Because if everyone here was nice then we wouldn’t have lost four people already.”

Kiibo frowns. “Excuse me Amami but you’re forgetting the fact that it’s Monokuma who is the main villain. I truly do believe that everyone here is good and the only logical explanation for people like Iruma and Tojo to have snapped is because of Monokuma and his motives.”

“Trust me, Kiibo,” Kaede says sadly. “I really want to believe everyone here is good too but there’s no doubt that there’s a horrible person hiding in our group. The best shot of ending this killing game is to expose them.”

“There’s no guarantee that my audio recordings will include who the bad person is,” Kiibo warns them. “And even if they do, listening to them is going to take a while. What if something bad happens before we find anything useful?”

“We’ll just have to hope that nothing bad happens then,” Kaede says. “It’s likely Monokuma is going to give us another motive tomorrow but with who is left and everything, well, I’m hoping no one will give in to it. I think most of us are friends by now and maybe it’s desperation talking but I think the motive will have to be something really dangerous for us to turn on each other.”

“Anything can be dangerous. Just look at the ticket,” Kiibo says. “I didn’t think much of it at first but it ended up causing Chabashira and Tojo to die.”

Rantaro looks extremely uncomfortable as he says, “I guess it really did.”

“T-That doesn’t mean whoever used it wanted them both to die,” Kaede quickly interjects.

“Um, weren’t we all under the impression that it was Angie who used it?” Kiibo asks. “And she really wanted Shirogane dead.”

Kaede winces. “Pointing fingers and accusing each other is what Monokuma wants. What’s done is done now. Of course I’m devastated that they’re both dead but there’s only one person to blame and that’s Monokuma.”

“I suppose so,” Kiibo sighs. “No one here would’ve ever turned to murder before Monokuma forced us to. Even though it’s all of us killing each other, we wouldn’t have to if it wasn’t for him. However, I simply don’t understand how humans can be led astray so easily. Killing should never be a solution for any problem.”

“Sometimes people do bad things when they have no other choice,” Kaede tells him.

“But everyone always has more than one choice,” Kiibo frowns. “No one but Iruma tried to kill to leave. No one but Angie tried to kill Shirogane because of her talent. Tojo wasn’t the one who caused Chabashira’s injury so it should’ve never been her responsibility to save Angie.”

“If I knew why they did what they did then I’d tell you,” Kaede snaps. “But I don’t, okay?”

“Ah...” Kiibo looks down at the floor. “Did I upset you?”

“No...no,” Kaede sighs, shaking her head. “I’m sorry. I’m not mad or anything. To tell you the truth, I’m just as confused as you are about everyone too. There’s just some things no one will ever understand, let’s put it that way.”

“Right...” Kiibo awkwardly looks to the side. “Excuse me, Amami? Are you okay? You’re looking pale...you haven’t caught what Momota might have, have you?”

“Me?” Rantaro blinks before bitterly smiling. “No, I don’t think so. I just have a lot on my mind, that’s all.”

“That’s understandable,” Kiibo says. “However, now that we’ve got my audio I think we might have a better chance of finding a way out of here! Should I start listening now?”

“Actually, there’s something I want to show you both before we start listening,” Kaede says and both males give her a curious look. “I...I found a secret passageway that leads into a hidden room the other day. Amami, um, you know that door you’ve been trying to open for a while now?”

Rantaro’s eyes go wide. “You found another entrance to the room I’ve been trying to get into?”

“I found it a couple of days ago,” Kaede admits quietly. “Sorry for not telling you earlier but...a lot of things have happened lately and I just never found the right time to say anything, you know?”

“Better late than never,” Rantaro says and Kaede can see how desperate he is to check the room out. “Is it safe for us to go and check it out?”

“I think so,” Kaede says. “But last time I went there I ended up getting myself locked out.”

“How?” Kiibo stares at her.

“I got a little too angry at something down there,” Kaede says with flushed cheeks.

“There’s...someone very interesting who is an absolute nightmare to talk with in that room. I think it’s the Monokuma making machine.”

“You didn’t think to break it?” Rantaro asks. “Because-”

“I don’t think breaking the machine is an option right now,” Kaede says. “Just, um, how about I just show you the room. Hopefully there’s no one down there right now...”

She hopes the trio doesn’t look too suspicious as she walks Kiibo and Rantaro to the school and towards the girl’s bathroom. She can’t help but laugh at their horrified expressions as she waits outside of the pink bathroom door, crossing her arms with a grin.

“Um...” Kiibo presses his fingers together. “Akamatsu, are you sure it’s okay for us to go inside?”

“Out of all the places for a hidden entrance to be,” Rantaro sighs. “Not even I’m brave enough to go in there without permission.”

“It’s not that big of a deal,” Kaede laughs. “It’s just a room!”

“B-But...” Kiibo hesitates. “V-Very well then! If you’re allowing us inside then...”

Kaede holds the door open as she ushers the two inside, grateful that there’s no one inside. She tries to ignore looking around too much, especially at the spot where Kokichi died and heads towards the wall and starts pressing around.

“Remember when I went in here to splash some water on my face?” Kaede asks Rantaro, who nods slowly. “Whilst I was by the sink I saw the wall open up in the mirror and Ouma stumble out of some hidden hallway.”

“Huh? Ouma found the hidden entrance first?” Kiibo asks in surprise.

Kaede shakes her head. "I don't think that's right. I think he was put there so he wasn't able to get help after he had finished his meal. I'm certain he received the poisoned one."

"Someone hid him?!" Kiibo looks distraught. "I simply can't comprehend why someone would do that! If someone knew he was dying then they should've helped him!"

"My first thought is that it could've been Iruma who hid him but I have a feeling that isn't right," Rantaro says as he watches Kaede press along the wall gently. "There's no reason for her to have known about the room."

"Did...did the bad person hide him?" Kiibo asks.

"Yeah, it seems so," Rantaro sighs. "But what doesn't make sense is why they would hide him in the first place. All the antidotes had been smashed. Even if Ouma had been found, the chances of helping him anyway would've been..."

Kiibo shudders. "Whilst it doesn't make sense, we can presume that Iruma poisoning his meal was his cause of death, right? W-Was Iruma working with the bad person perhaps?"

"It's a possibility," Rantaro says. "It's a shame that we'll never be able to find out."

Kaede lets out a sound as the wall suddenly springs back and clasps her hands together. "Hey, it opened up again!"

Kiibo stares at the hole in the wall in surprise. "Unbelievable! The door is blended in so well with the wall that I didn't even notice that there was one there."

"So there really is a second entrance that even I didn't know about," Rantaro murmurs before quietly muttering to himself, "how is that fair?"

"I should probably warn you both that the walk down to the room isn't very pretty," Kaede says as she clutches her arm. "There's...a lot of blood that hasn't been cleaned up. It's dried up but still..."

She hears Kiibo gasp as the robot takes a step forward. "Y-You're not kidding!"

"All of this is Ouma's right?" Rantaro raises an eyebrow. "Isn't there a little too much blood, don't you think?"

"Huh? What do you mean?" Kaede asks hesitantly. "It's not like I know how much someone should bleed when they've been poisoned."

"It just seems excessive," Rantaro comments. "Akamatsu, you don't happen to remember what poison Iruma used, do you?"

"Um..." Kaede pauses to think. "Oh, that's right! It was in a small and pink bottle. It was a poison for beginners! I remember Iruma reading what was on the bottle. I think she said it was odourless and tasteless or something."

"...I see." Rantaro pulls a face as he peers further into the hallway. "Just how much poison did Iruma put into the meal anyway? I get that being poisoned is of course going to cause problems but this just looks like overkill."

Kaede swallows as Rantaro heads further into the hallway, clearly thinking hard about something as he goes on ahead. Kiibo nods at her before heading in himself and Kaede follows nervously, wringing her hands together as she once again walks down the bloodied hallway.

The hidden room looks the exact same as last time she was in it. The plate of food is still on the table, the couches still look comfy and Motherkuma is still here. Kaede gives the head a pointed glare and pouts.

“How interesting...” Rantaro murmurs as he circles around Motherkuma, obviously intrigued by the floating head. “You look just like Monokuma but something tells me you’re not...”

“That’s Motherkuma,” Kaede tells him. “I talked to her when I first came in here. To be honest she’s no help at all and very annoying.”

“And you’re rude,” Motherkuma snaps abruptly. “What are you doing down here again?! You’re not welcome down here and neither are your friends!”

“I-It can talk?!” Kiibo squawks before ducking behind Kaede. “Are you a robot just like me?”

“Firstly, I’m a she, not an it,” Motherkuma says with a scowl. “Secondly, I’m Motherkuma! I’m a mother, not a robot!”

“But...” Kiibo frowns. “Monokuma is a robot, right? So if you’re his mother then aren’t you one too?”

“You shouldn’t ask a lady such questions,” Motherkuma sniffs. “Although since you’re just a robot I don’t expect you to understand how to treat others.”

“I’ll have you know you’re being very robophobic at the moment!” Kiibo yells, jabbing a finger in the head’s direction. “I’ll be seeing you in court!”

“Huh? You’re going to take me to court for telling the truth?” Motherkuma cackles. “Get a grip, robot boy! There’s plenty of other things you should be worrying about right now rather than someone calling you a mean name. How shallow are you?”

“I think I just deserve some respect,” Kiibo sniffs. “Akamatsu’s right, you really are very annoying.”

“Well excuse me but it’s not like I’m the one trespassing right now!” Motherkuma scowls. “You’re in my room insulting me! Kids these days don’t have any respect for their superiors!”

“Why the hell should we respect someone who is helping someone keep up trapped here?” Kaede counters. “Just shut up whilst we have a look around. I don’t see any rules about us being in here so you have no right to complain.”

“No rules, huh?” Motherkuma’s eyes sparkle. “I can soon sort that out! Don’t you worry!”

“Come on guys, let’s stop arguing,” Rantaro sighs as he holds his hands up. “She does have a point that we’re trespassing. We should be lucky that she’s not alerting anyone that we’re down here.”

“See! This guy gets it!” Motherkuma says. “I bet this guy was brought up right. Y’know, I always blame the parents when kids turn out to be delinquents, just like the both of you!”

“What the hell did you say about my parents?” Kaede rolls her sleeves up furiously. “At least my parents would never hurt anyone! You’re the one who is helping run a sick killing game for your own pleasure!”

“Hey! I’m very proud of what my sons and I have accomplished!” Motherkuma bites back. “Besides, it’s not as if you all actually have to play! You’re the ones who are killing each other!”

“We wouldn’t have to if it wasn’t-”

“If it wasn’t for you, blah, blah, blah!” Motherkuma rolls her eyes. “Get a grip, lady! You know deep down every single person here is capable of ignoring any motive that gets handed out and even any time limit given!”

“How the hell are we supposed to ignore a time limit?!” Kaede raises her voice. “If we do then we’ll just die!”

“At least you won’t die murderers then,” Motherkuma says smugly.

Kaede stares at the bear incredulously. “You’re actually insane! You don’t even care how we die, do you? Just so long as we do!”

“I mean, I do get upset if a game does end up boring,” Motherkuma admits. “No one likes it when a game ends too soon.”

“A game, you say?” Rantaro asks curiously. “I was under the impression that this was the first killing game to ever happen.”

“Ah...” Motherkuma pauses. “Who knows.”

“What do you mean by that?” Kaede frowns. “You’re practically the one behind this-”

“Do you always jump to conclusions?” Motherkuma asks. “Sheesh, what a shame that you’re here and not that detective who was planned. You’re lucky there hasn’t been a class trial yet because if you had to take part in one then you’d probably get all of your friends killed!”

Kaede growls as she tries to control her shaking hands. “I’d do absolutely anything to save my friends!”

“Oh, I am very well aware of that,” Motherkuma sneers. “I was watching the entire time as you went back into the library to set up a trap to kill someone!”

Kaede wheezes as if she was punched in the stomach. She instantly feels the heavy weight of Rantaro and Kiibo staring at her incredulously. “That’s...”

“That’s what? Different?” Motherkuma laughs and it’s loud and ugly. “Listen missy, don’t come in here acting all high and mighty just because you’re still here. A little hypocritical insulting me and acting like you’re so much better than me when you couldn’t even last three days without planning to smash someone’s head in with a shot put ball-”

“I think that’s enough,” Rantaro says calmly. “If you have nothing useful to say then maybe keep your mouth shut.”

“Huuuh? Are you defending her?” Motherkuma pauses before bursting out into childish giggles. “Oh how cruel irony can be. If only you could all see what I’ve seen.”

“Of course we’re going to defend her,” Kiibo says with a frown. “You’re the enemy and Akamatsu isn’t. Why should we believe anything you tell us?”

“Oh? So you’ll believe me if I tell you something important but not if I say something that makes someone look bad?” Motherkuma sighs. “Sheesh, it’s a surprise how so many of you are still alive. It doesn’t hurt to be a little suspicious, you know?”

“Of course I’m suspicious of a lot of things,” Rantaro says. “It’s more so I don’t really care about what you’re on about. We’ve been put into a strange situation and I’d be naive to presume that no one ends up cracking.”

“Ah...is that so?” Motherkuma says. “Welp! It’s your funeral, pretty boy!”

Kaede’s tongue feels heavy as she turns her back on the bear, squeezing her eyes shut when Motherkuma laughs at her. She jumps when a hand carefully touches her shoulder and she snaps her head up to see Rantaro giving her a worried glance.

“Are you doing okay?” Rantaro asks quietly. “We can always leave if Motherkuma is upsetting you.”

Kaede shakes her head. “It’s fine. I’m just surprised that...what I did wasn’t brought up any sooner.” A lump grows in her throat and her voice catches as she says, “she wasn’t lying, Amami. When you told me you dismantled the trap in the library, I went back later on to fix it a-and...”

Rantaro is quiet as he looks down at the floor before sighing. “I’m sorry you felt so pressured to help everyone-”

“You shouldn’t be apologising,” Kaede hisses. “Amami, I was going to kill someone!”

“But you didn’t,” Rantaro says. “Motherkuma is just trying to get under your skin. She’s going to use anything and everything to hurt you. I’m not going to pretend I’m happy that you tried to do something so stupid but what’s the point holding it against you if you never actually went through with it? Besides...” Rantaro sighs again. “It’s not like I’m much better. A lot of my actions have led to a lot of serious consequences.”

“Why do you both keep whispering behind my back?” Kiibo asks a little too suddenly and both Kaede and Rantaro jump. “Are you sure you’re both not talking about me? This is twice now you’ve started talking together with me in the room...”

“It’s just a coincidence, that’s all,” Rantaro reassures him. “I was just comforting Akamatsu, that’s all.”

“Motherkuma was pretty harsh,” Kiibo says before pulling a face. “Um, Akamatsu? What she said about you...you know?”

Kaede nods bitterly. “Yeah, she wasn’t lying...”

“Ah...” Kiibo doesn’t say anything for a moment. “My apologies, I’m simply still processing this new piece of information.”

“It’s fine, it really is,” Kaede says. “I’m not expecting you to be okay with what I did and I’ll understand if-”

“Um, I’m not going to start ignoring you just because of a mistake you made,” Kiibo says as he rolls his eyes. “I mean, even if you did plan to kill someone, you didn’t go through with it. Obviously you’ve at least got some morals.”

“The fact I even thought about it is bad enough,” Kaede responds with a wince.

“Didn’t you just tell me that people are complicated?” Kiibo reminds her. “It’s impossible for humans to be perfect so I’m failing to understand why you hold yourself to such high standards. You thought about killing in a killing game. That doesn’t seem too out of place for me.”

"I'm just really disappointed in myself," Kaede tells him. "Because Monokuma almost got the best of me only a couple of days in. It's embarrassing."

"Please don't be too hard on yourself," Rantaro says. "It's a little surprising to hear that you...tried to do something so stupid but if you crumble now then you'll be letting Monokuma and the mastermind win."

"We should just break Motherkuma now," Kaede mutters. "It'll fix everything."

"I heard that!" Motherkuma bellows. "I'll have you know breaking me is next to impossible! I'm made of the strongest materials you can think of and-"

"Can't we just unplug you from the wall?" Kiibo asks.

Motherkuma snorts. "Huuuh? You really think these wires do something? They're just for decoration! They're like...human hair! Useless but at least they make me look pretty!"

"You think wires make you look pretty?" Kiibo asks in confusion.

"Whilst breaking Motherkuma does seem like the most helpful answer," Rantaro says. "I doubt we'll be able to. The fact that we're even allowed down here should be a big enough hint that Motherkuma knows we can't do anything to her."

"That's correct!" Motherkuma cheers. "If you even touch me then I'll electrocute you!"

"That's annoying," Kaede grumbles.

"How about we just ignore her for now?" Rantaro suggests. "There's plenty to investigate here, after all."

"Really?" Kaede raises an eyebrow. "This room is pretty...empty."

"Well I don't know about you, Akamatsu, but I'm certainly curious about the plate of food on the table," Kiibo says, pointing towards it. "I recognise that food. That's the food Tojo was handing out on the day of the time limit, correct?"

"It's pretty strange how it ended up in here," Rantaro says as he crouches down in front of it. "It doesn't look like it's been touched much either. I wonder if any food on it has been eaten at all..."

"The fork next to it looks pretty clean," Kiibo points out. "Although I suppose if someone only had a mouthful of food then their fork wouldn't get dirty."

"Hmm..." Rantaro picks up the fork and closes an eye as he inspects it closely. "I'm not spotting anything on it."

Kaede wrinkles her nose when she looks at the food. It's obviously starting to look disgusting after being left alone for so long. She's surprised that there's not been any flies attracted to it. She sniffs and pinches her nose quickly.

"It smells really bad," Kaede says as she pulls a face.

Rantaro ends up giving up on the plate of food on the table and looks around. He looks rather disappointed that the room is so lacklustre. "This seriously can't be everything..."

"Well unless you want to start going through the rubbish then this is pretty much everything," Kiibo says. "Although I doubt...the rubbish...um, Akamatsu. He's actually going to go through the

rubbish.”

“Oh my God...” Kaede can’t help but sigh as Rantaro marches over to the bin and lifts up the lid. “Amami, he wasn’t actually being serious-”

“Hey, the two of you should come and take a look at this.”

Kaede blinks in surprise before heading over to the bin and peering inside. She gags as she puts her hands over her mouth. Whatever is in the bin smells even worse than what’s on the table. “Y-You could’ve warned us about the smell!”

“Try to ignore it,” Rantaro tells her. “Don’t you see what’s in here?”

“Um...” Kaede looks a little more closely. “Hey, wait a second. Is that another meal?”

“Finding one meal down here is weird enough but two?” Kiibo puts a hand to his chin. “And why is this one in the bin? To keep one plate out in the open and the other in here is a little strange.”

Kaede looks down at the food that is splatted down the plastic bin bag. It looks pretty much identical to the other plate of food. She also notices that the plate in the bin is broken. It most likely smashed when it was thrown into the bin. However, if she narrows her eyes just a little then...

“Hey, is it just me or do some of the shards in the bin not match?” Kaede asks. “I don’t think the plate is the only broken thing in the bin.”

“Oh, I think you’re right!” Kiibo says.

“How about we take a closer look?” Rantaro suggests as he picks up the bin and starts to slowly pour its contents onto the floor. Kaede takes a deep breath as the food slops out onto the floor.

The mismatched shards are stuck within the food but are much more easily identifiable out in the open. The white shards are clearly pieces of broken plate. The other shards are quickly identified as glass.

“It’s a shame we can’t fix the glass shards back together,” Rantaro says. “If we could then we’d be able to figure out what they used to be.”

“A cup perhaps?” Kiibo suggests. “Perhaps someone had a drink with their meal?”

“Maybe...” Kaede frowns. “But it’s a little weird why someone would throw both a plate and cup into the bin when they could just be washed.”

“The plot certainly thickens,” Rantaro says, hesitating as he reaches for a shard before backing out. “There’s no point cutting a finger over a piece of glass. Besides, everything looks broken beyond repair.”

“Are you all done trashing my room?” Motherkuma groans. “How dare you leave me to deal with such a smell! That food smells worse than rotten!”

“Rotten...” Rantaro frowns. “This food looks a lot more than rotten. Actually, wait a second.”

He grabs the plate of food from the table and kneels down on the floor, placing the plate next to the food on the floor.

“Look. The food on the plate doesn’t look too bad,” Rantaro says. “Of course it’s inedible but it doesn’t look like it’s gone bad yet. However, the food in the bin looks disgusting. Now what

confuses me is that these two meals are the exact same as each other from what it looks like, same food and everything.”

“How does one look so normal and one look so...” Kaede gags. “Disgusting.”

“One of them has clearly been tampered with,” Rantaro says. “Akamatsu, you said Ouma came from this room, right?”

“Y-Yeah but I don’t get why-” Kaede stops herself. “That’s his plate of food, isn’t it?”

“What’s his plate of food doing in here?” Kiibo asks.

“That is a good question,” Rantaro says. “But what confuses me is why it was put in the bin.”

“Maybe the, um, mastermind didn’t want to deal with the bad smell?” Kaede suggests.

“Mastermind? Oh, do you mean the bad person?” Kiibo asks.

“Yeah, we decided to call them the mastermind,” Rantaro says. “And to answer your question, Akamatsu, I don’t think that’s right. This is the mastermind’s room, right? They shouldn’t have to hide things here yet...”

“You know, for being the mastermind’s room we sure got in easily enough,” Kiibo points out. “Akamatsu mentioned that she was locked out the first time she came here but we were let in easily enough the second time. If the mastermind or Motherkuma didn’t want us down here then they would’ve made the hallway inaccessible.”

Rantaro’s eyes go wide. “You’re right! That really doesn’t make any sense.”

“So what?” Kaede nervously wrings her hands together. “Are you saying the mastermind doesn’t care about us being down here?”

“Maybe they wanted us to find what’s down here,” Rantaro suddenly suggests. “If Motherkuma really wanted us out then she would’ve found a way to remove us.”

“Or maybe I just don’t care!” Motherkuma chimes back. “It’s not like those plates of food mean anything!”

“I-Indeed,” Kiibo sighs. “After all, Monokuma did let Iruma graduate. If there was any foul play regarding Ouma’s death then I think Monokuma wouldn’t have let her go.”

“The robot is right,” Motherkuma says. “Besides, you can’t have a retrial for a trial that didn’t even happen!”

“...but still,” Rantaro murmurs. “Something isn’t adding up. If only the glass wasn’t so broken...”

“I think...maybe we should just leave for now,” Kaede says. “The smell is really getting to me and Kiibo does have a point. Iruma graduated. I know the plates of food are really confusing but I don’t think we know enough to do anything about it.”

“...how frustrating,” Rantaro sighs. “But I guess you’re right. I think we’ve pushed our luck enough today. Let’s leave before something bad actually happens.”

“Phew! Good riddance!” Motherkuma calls after them as they leave. “And don’t come back!”

Kaede is making lunch for everyone when Korekiyo joins her in the kitchen.

“May I?” He asks, gesturing towards the sink with a kettle in his hand. “I want to have a cup of tea with my meal.”

“Ah! Let me just move!” Kaede says as she twirls out of the way. “This kitchen is really small, huh?”

“Indeed, there’s certainly not much space in here,” Korekiyo says. “Although I suppose when Tojo was here she didn’t need any help so the lack of space wouldn’t have mattered to her.”

Kaede stares uncomfortably at the sandwiches she’s made. “These really don’t compare to anything that Tojo made us, huh?”

“Nonsense,” Korekiyo says. “There’s little to no reason to make such complicated meals when the only purpose of food is to fill you up, correct? Of course, people do have different preferences but you shouldn’t get upset over what skills you have and don’t have. Don’t take this personally, Akamatsu, but I doubt you’ll ever be able to make food as delicious as Tojo’s.”

“True...” Kaede sighs. “I really miss her a-and Chabashira. I miss everyone, even Iruma.”

“But that’s only natural,” Korekiyo tells her as he fills up the kettle with water. “Your words have made me just realise we’ve never really had a chance to mourn anyone just yet.”

“Is there even time to mourn?” Kaede mumbles, slicing a sandwich in half. “I’m pretty sure Monokuma is handing out the next motive tomorrow and...”

“You’re worried,” Korekiyo states and sets the kettle to boil. “You’re very kind, Akamatsu. Whilst you’re scared of tomorrow’s motive I’m rather excited to see what it is. After all, it’s always interesting to see how people react to receiving an incentive to murder.”

“That’s...” Kaede clears her throat as she starts to pile sandwiches on a plate.

“I’ve made you uncomfortable. I apologise.” Korekiyo pulls several cups from a cupboard.

“However, I find that noting people’s reactions is rather beneficial. For example, I must admit if I had to have predicted who would’ve snapped under the pressure of the first motive I would’ve picked Iruma. However, Angie’s sudden hatred towards Shirogane did take me by surprise.”

“If you knew that Iruma was vulnerable then why didn’t you say anything?” Kaede asks with a frown.

Korekiyo fiddles with his bandages as he says, “well I certainly didn’t want her to set her sights on me. She’s much too crude for my liking.”

“That’s not the point,” Kaede sighs.

“You tend to get upset easily, don’t you?” Korekiyo points out. “Yet I’ve witnessed first hand your temper. Every time Monokuma enters the room it’s like you’re a completely different person.”

“I really hate him,” Kaede grumbles. “Don’t you hate him for trapping you here?”

“Of course I detest Monokuma and the situation I’ve been put in,” Korekiyo says before his mask twitches. “But I must also thank him for allowing me the opportunity to witness situations I would’ve never seen outside of these walls. Even you must find it curious how people react to different situations, yes?”

"I care more about helping people get out of here," Kaede says firmly.

Korekiyo pauses before smiling under his mask. "Ah yes, that does make sense. My deepest apologies, Akamatsu. It seems I've not been making a good impression. I must assure you I have no intentions of hurting anyone here if that's what you're worried about. After all, if someone dies here then they'll only be a victim of Monokuma. As interesting as the entire situation is, I wholeheartedly hate that bear."

"Yep, that's something we can both agree on at least," Kaede says as she picks up the plate of sandwiches. "Um, lunch is ready so if you want to go into the dining room..."

"Is everyone going to be eating with us for lunch, do you know?" Korekiyo asks.

Kaede shakes her head. "Momota is still ill so I'm going to fetch him his lunch and both Angie and Shirogane probably aren't going to join us again so I'll also bring them something to eat."

"You're too kind," Korekiyo says.

"Also Amami is feeling ill too so I said I'd bring him something," Kaede quickly lies. "Kiibo also mentioned that he's going to be looking after Momota and Amami so he's going to stay in the dormitories."

"Oh my." Korekiyo puts a hand to his mouth. "We're going to have no one left at this rate."

"Hoshi and Gonta should be joining us still," Kaede points out.

"It's simply strange," Korekiyo says. "There were thirteen of us here when we had all woken up and now there's only going to be four of us at lunch. I wonder if Monokuma anticipated his game to be so successful so early on?"

"If the lack of people makes you both uncomfortable then I'll happily join my darling students for a spot of lunch!" Monokuma suddenly announces from the dining room. He pokes his head around the door. "Hello!"

"Ugh..." Kaede rolls her eyes. "There's literally no reason for you to join us."

"Nonsense! If you're feeling lonely then I can soon fix that!" Monokuma promises her, running around her feet as Kaede heads into the dining room and sets the plate of sandwiches down. "I've actually got something to ask you so-"

"Shinguji? Will you keep an eye on the food whilst I deliver some plates to the dormitories?" Kaede asks, ignoring Monokuma as the bear pouts.

"Yes, that is okay with me."

"I actually really do have something important to say!" Monokuma presses.

Kaede groans as she pulls a face. "Then spit it out! I'm busy right now."

"By any chance have any of you seen something that looks like a flashlight?" Monokuma asks. Kaede tilts her head to the side and Monokuma sighs. "Okay, I'll take that as a no."

"Why? Have you lost something?" Korekiyo asks.

"N-No!" Monokuma growls. "But it's only hit me that you poor students have been missing out on some...memories."

“Memories?” Kaede’s eyes go wide. “Are you the reason why we can’t remember how we got here?!”

“No, you’re the reason you can’t remember how you got here,” Monokuma says. “Your memories are your own responsibility, Akamatsu-”

“Bullshit, you’re hiding something from us,” Kaede snaps. “And I don’t have the patience for your mind games-”

“Okay, okay!” Monokuma sighs. “Sheesh, girls can be scary! I will admit that you all should remember a little more than you do right now but there’s been some...unforeseen problems. I mean, I guess I could just tell you what you don’t know but at this point it wouldn’t make any sense-”

“How can we trust what you say anyway?” Korekiyo questions. “Indeed, you’re the one who holds all the answers but how do we know you’ll be telling us the truth?”

“Exactly!” Monokuma agrees. “The truth is a little out there and I don’t think my poor little heart can take another beating from Akamatsu.”

“As if you have a heart,” Kaede growls. “If you’re done wasting my time then I have literally anything better to do right now than talk to you.”

“Ouch, harsh!” Monokuma sighs. “About your memories...forget about them. It’s far too late to start handing them out now anyway.”

“Whatever,” Kaede grumbles as she grabs a trolley that she prepared earlier with plates of food. “Get out of my way, I’m done talking to you.”

“There’s no need to be rude,” Monokuma teases. “It’s making me almost regret the nice motive I have planned for tomorrow.”

“We don’t want another stupid motive,” Kaede says as she pushes past him. “And even if you do give us another one then no one is going to fall for it.”

“Are you sure about that?” Monokuma grins and Kaede walks away from him before she breaks one of his rules.

It’s decided that Rantaro will stay with Kiibo for the night and Kaede locks them both in Kokichi’s room, patting the key that’s under her vest as she walks away. Rantaro has offered his room up for the night and it’s not like Kaede has any reason to decline his offer. She’s currently holding onto Rantaro’s bedroom key as she approaches his door, ready to go to bed when a voice stops her.

“Um, A-Akamatsu!”

“Oh!” Kaede spins around and sees Tsumugi standing outside of Kaito’s bedroom door. “Hi...”

“Momota isn’t feeling well,” Tsumugi tells her awkwardly. “We’re supposed to train every night but he said he’s not up to it. H-He told me to...maybe ask you to join me. O-Only if you want to though!”

“I think it’s about time we had a chat,” Kaede says and Tsumugi blinks in surprise. “Momota always trains outside, right? Let’s go.”

Kaede keeps a firm grip on Rantaro's key as she walks outside with Tsumugi. It's dark out and Kaede looks up at the stars before sighing. She's about to say something when Tsumugi beats her to it.

"I'm really sorry about Chabashira," Tsumugi tells her quietly. "You said that this morning nothing that happened yesterday was my fault but I don't think that's right. After all, Angie was trying to kill me, not Chabashira."

"Why were you up there anyway?" Kaede asks.

"Angie asked me to meet her in her art room," Tsumugi explains. "I plainly thought she was just going to tell me to stay away from everyone. I know she doesn't like me much so I wasn't expecting anything good to happen, of course."

"If you thought that then why agree to meet with her?" Kaede asks as a wave of exhaustion rolls over her. Her tongue feels heavy. "Surely with a talent like yours then you should've been able to figure out that someone was trying to get you."

Tsumugi looks slightly upset at the accusation before saying, "yeah, you're right. It was plainly stupid of me to see Angie and now look what's happened."

"I didn't..." Kaede sighs. "I didn't mean to upset you. I'm just really confused, Shirogane. I just don't get why you decided to lie about your talent."

Tsumugi laughs bitterly. "Would you want to tell everyone that you're an assassin in a killing game? I knew as soon as people found out that they'd hate me. I'm nothing more than a threat, Akamatsu. I'm sorry for pretending to be someone I'm not but those couple of days I had with you..."

"Did you...not have any friends before waking up here?" Kaede asks cautiously.

Tsumugi shrugs. "Not really. Every friend I made...doesn't exist anymore."

"Do you mean they..." Kaede winces. "Died?"

"Some of them," Tsumugi says. "Some of them are still here but I'm not sure how much longer for. We come from completely different worlds, Akamatsu. I don't think you'll ever understand what it's like to be me."

"Maybe I never will but I shouldn't have started to ignore you like I did," Kaede says. "So for that I'm really sorry."

"Oh! No, you don't have to apologise-" Tsumugi stammers.

Kaede shakes her head. "No, I do. You're right, I'm never going to understand what it's like to be you. However, despite the situation we're in we're both equals. We're both victims of Monokuma. I won't lie, I really, really don't like your talent but you haven't given me a reason to actually worry about you, you know?"

"Don't worry, I don't like my talent either," Tsumugi says with a self deprecating smile. "But Akamatsu? I do think you're being a little stupid for still wanting to be friends with me. I could kill you in a thousand different ways."

"True," Kaede says, "but it's not super cool to hurt friends."

“F-Friends?” Tsumugi stares at her with a confused expression before it melts into something softer. “Are we still friends?”

“We never stopped being friends. I’ve just been making lots of bad choices ever since I woke up here,” Kaede reassures her. “Hey, I’m sorry that your talent got outed too. Even though it hurt me finding out you had been lying, I guess I understand why you did what you did.”

“That’s...really nice of you to say,” Tsumugi says. “Usually when people find out who I am they either run away in fear or try to get me killed. O-Obviously I’m still here but of course it’s no fun waiting to be attacked.”

“Um, by the way...” Kaede hesitates before asking. “How did you manage Monokuma to swap your name with the actual Shirogane on the tablets? And do you know where she is? I’m going to presume that she’s one of the graduate students and not Maki Harukawa.”

“Ah...” Tsumugi wraps a strand of hair around her finger. “I suppose that does make me look a little suspicious, doesn’t it? The truth is Harukawa, um, Shirogane and I knew each other before we woke up here and she always told me if I felt like I was in danger then we could swap names. I-I was really happy to see her on the tablet but she’s not actually here so I wonder where she went...”

“You both knew each other?” Kaede blinks. “Sorry! I’m not accusing you of anything but it’s a little hard to imagine how an assassin and a cosplayer even met in the first place.”

“Fate?” Tsumugi suggests with a weak laugh. “Truthfully I can’t actually remember meeting her. Maybe I just forgot or something.”

“It’s a shame she’s not here then,” Kaede says. “At least then you wouldn’t have been alone these last couple days.”

“I’ve not been alone,” Tsumugi frowns. “Momota has been keeping me company. He just...doesn’t know when to stop trying, does he?”

“Does it not make you happy that he still wants to be your friend after everything?” Kaede asks, feeling guilty as she says, “he was the only person to see if you were okay after Monokuma made you expose your secret.”

“Was he? I don’t really remember,” Tsumugi admits. “I just remember feeling...defeated. I remember thinking that now my secret is out, someone is going to kill me. A-And I was right.”

“I’m really sorry about Angie-”

“It’s my own fault for agreeing to meet her,” Tsumugi says quietly. “Because deep down I knew something bad was going to happen and still went to see her anyway. I think a small part of me...gave up.”

“...oh.”

“I-I’m sorry! I shouldn’t be saying such things!” Tsumugi instantly panics with a tight smile. “You’ve gone through a lot too so-”

“That doesn’t matter!” Kaede argues. “Suffering should never be a competition! God, Shirogane. I’m so sorry. I’ve been so wrapped up in my own problems that I never even thought about yours-”

“No, no, no!” Tsumugi holds up her hands. “Please don’t blame yourself! It was just a momentary lapse in judgement! Besides, I should be the one apologising! If I hadn’t gone upstairs then Angie

wouldn't have even had the chance to kill Chabashira..."

"We can't just keep passing the blame around," Kaede says softly. "The only person to blame is Monokuma and that's it."

"Not even Angie?" Tsumugi asks curiously. "I understand she thought I was a threat but..."

"Can I...tell you a secret?" Kaede says so quietly it almost comes out as a whisper.

"A secret? If you want. It's not like I'll have anyone to tell it to anyway," Tsumugi laughs before sighing.

Kaede uncomfortably shifts the weight from one foot to the other. "Monokuma tricked the person who used the ticket. They weren't after you specifically but someone else."

"Oh? Is that so?" Tsumugi blinks. "That's weird. Why would Monokuma do that?"

"He's protecting someone, I think," Kaede says. "But the only reason why Chabashira and Tojo died is because of Monokuma and his tricks. He's always going to be the main culprit for every problem we have. I know you might not see it that way since Angie did try and kill out of nowhere but-"

"No, I wouldn't say it was out of nowhere," Tsumugi says. "She was just trying to protect everyone, I think. I don't actually know her personally but she's been really nice from the start. I don't think she would've tried to do something so malicious without a reason."

"That's right," Kaede says. "It's Monokuma that's causing all our problems. It's entirely Monokuma's fault that your talent was exposed too. Because...he's giving us motives that he knows is going to appeal to at least one of us. We need to be really careful tomorrow because I'm certain he's going to announce a new motive during breakfast."

"You'll have to tell me about it when you have the chance," Tsumugi tells her.

Kaede blinks. "Are you not going to join everyone tomorrow?"

"It's a little too soon, don't you think?" Tsumugi asks. "Even if you're okay with who I am, I doubt everyone else is going to feel the same. I think I'd be more comfortable just staying out of the way and-"

"Please stop hiding," Kaede says and her hands clench by her sides. "I've really missed you a-and with how fast people have been dying lately...we need to stick together. If you get uncomfortable tomorrow then you can leave right away but can you please at least try and join me for breakfast?"

"Ah..." Tsumugi bites her bottom lip. "If you put it like that then..."

"You're still a part of the group," Kaede says. "It's important for you to be around so you don't miss anything crucial. I'm fine with relaying messages but what if something bad happens to me, huh? Then who would keep you up to date?"

"But nothing bad is going to happen to you!" Tsumugi insists firmly. "I won't let anything bad happen to you."

Kaede stumbles at Tsumugi's sudden outburst before laughing nervously. "That's really nice of you to say."

“I mean it though,” Tsumugi tells her, wearing an unreadable expression on her face. “You’re...really important, Akamatsu. To me. To ending this game. I plainly believe you’re the only person here with the guts to stand up to Monokuma. Of course I’d never let anything bad happen to you.”

Kaede struggles to find the right words before saying, “I can’t end the killing game on my own though and I refuse to let people die for me. The sentiment is nice but please don’t do anything on my behalf that’ll get you hurt, Shirogane. I need you as much as you need me.”

“Is that what you really think?”

“Of course,” Kaede answers. “Everyone here deserves to live. I’m going to do everything I can to save everyone or die trying.”

“...you sound like some sort of video game protagonist,” Tsumugi giggles. “But I’m glad you feel that way. Well, not about you dying though. Maybe don’t do that?”

“I’ll try my best, of course,” Kaede says.

Tsumugi smiles. “You know, it’s been really nice being able to talk to you again. I’ve really missed you, Akamatsu.”

“I’m sorry I’ve been such an idiot lately,” Kaede says. “I’ve missed talking to you too.”

“Well, the main thing is that we’re talking again, right?” Tsumugi says before yawning. “But as nice as it has been to catch up, I’m getting really tired. If you want, can we walk to breakfast together?”

“Yes!” Kaede claps her hands together. “I’d love that!”

Tsumugi looks a lot happier as the two head to bed. At least she doesn’t ask any questions when Kaede heads to Rantaro’s room and instead waves her a goodnight.

True to her word, Tsumugi walks Kaede to the dining room. Kaede can’t help but feel protective when Tsumugi positions herself behind the pianist as they walk into the dining room.

To Kaede’s surprise, only Gonta is inside this morning. The large male is carefully plating out food for breakfast. “Oh, good morning!” Gonta says happily. “Ah, Shirogane join us for breakfast! That good! Gonta worried she was going to stay in room again!”

“You were worried about me?” Tsumugi murmurs gently. “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to cause you any stress!”

“Gonta no stress! Gonta just worried,” Gonta admits. “But Gonta really happy that Shirogane been eating her meals. Gonta saw that Angie’s been skipping her meals so Gonta make something extra yummy this morning to surprise her with!”

Kaede isn’t expecting too much but is pleasantly surprised to notice a bowl of chopped up fruit waiting for her. “Did you make breakfast alone, Gonta?”

“Yep! Gonta tell Hoshi yesterday that he wanted to make breakfast today so Hoshi let him!” Gonta says. “Fruit healthy and delicious so Gonta decided to chop lots up for everyone so people have energy! Gonta know Monokuma is going to do something bad today so we need to be prepared for

him!”

“You’re on about the motive, right?” Tsumugi says as she takes a seat next to Kaede.

Gonta nods. “Gonta not too worried though because Kiibo is going to help us!”

“Kiibo?” Tsumugi asks as Kaede freezes.

“Yes! Kiibo has strange recording in him and Akamatsu thinks there might be something important to hear!” Gonta explains. “Ouma on recording and someone else! Gonta no recognise voice but they were talking about how everyone hated bugs!”

Tsumugi’s hand stills. “Really? That’s kind of weird.”

“M-Maybe it’s not a big deal,” Kaede says. “But there’s no point getting everyone’s hopes up about finding anything important, right? It’s probably for the best if we keep Kiibo’s audio on the downlow for now.”

“Oh, if that what Akamatsu wants!” Gonta happily complies.

“Yes, maybe that is for the best,” Tsumugi says. “Um, where is Kiibo by the way? Surely you know where he is, Akamatsu?”

“N-No…” Kaede murmurs. “I haven’t seen him this morning. We left together, remember?”

“That’s right,” Tsumugi laughs. “Silly me!”

“Um, how many plates does Gonta need to deliver to dormitories?” Gonta asks. “Angie probably not come today and Momota might still be ill. Um, Amami was ill too yesterday right? Shall Gonta make him a plate too?”

“I think that might be for the best,” Kaede says.

“Momota and Amami are both ill?” Tsumugi asks curiously. “I wonder what caused that.”

“Momota started burning up yesterday during breakfast,” Kaede explains. “And Amami said he had a headache I think so…”

“That’s a shame,” Tsumugi says. “I hope they both feel better soon.”

The assassin is quiet as more people arrive. The dining room is a little more packed than yesterday’s lunch now that Tsumugi is here. Ryoma simply nods at her whilst Korekiyo looks at Tsumugi with intrigue.

“Is Kiibo not joining us again?” Ryoma asks as he picks up a fork. “Strange…”

“I’m not sure where he is to be honest,” Kaede lies. “Maybe he feels left out since he can’t eat…”

“But Monokuma make announcement today, right?” Gonta frowns. “Kiibo should not miss that.”

Kaede awkwardly slurps on her coffee, groaning when she hears the all too familiar pitter-patter of Monokuma’s feet. “Here we go again…”

“Goooooooood morning my wonderful students!” Monokuma sings as he bursts through the doors. “Oh look! Harukawa has finally decided to show her face! It’s about time she left her room!”

“Don’t be cruel,” Ryoma says. “You have a motive to give us, right? Just get it over and done with.”

“Sheesh, talk about getting straight to the point,” Monokuma sighs. “But you’re right, of course I have a motive for you all! The game would be completely ruined if it wasn’t for the motives!”

“And what is that supposed to mean?” Korekiyo asks. “In fact, what is that in your hands? I don’t believe I recognise that book...”

Monokuma looks proud as he approaches the table. “This is the most chilling motive yet,” he announces dramatically. “Not only is it bone chilling but it’s bone moving too!”

“What?” Kaede frowns. “Also shouldn’t you wait for everyone to arrive before-”

“There’s no point wasting time, Akamatsu,” Monokuma sighs as if Kaede had said something incredibly stupid. “And I have a feeling everyone will really like this motive. It has to be my most generous one yet! I think some thank yous are in order.”

“As if we’ll ever thank you for anything,” Ryoma says. “Seriously, just get on with it.”

“Very well then!” Monokuma clears his throat before slamming the book he’s holding down onto the table with a thump. “Introducing the third motive of the killing game!”

“A book?” Tsumugi tilts her head to the side. “Um...”

“You’re not giving us a new list of rules to follow are you?” Kaede asks as she gives the book an exhausted look.

“No, but now that you mention it...” Monokuma waves his paw. “Nah, that would be too much hassle. Now I’ll tell you what isn’t a hassle! Raising the dead!”

“Huh?!” Gonta looks at the book with alarm. “What you mean by that?!”

“Are you just messing with us?” Kaede asks. “Seriously, if you’re just playing around then leave-”

“Oh no, I’m serious,” Monokuma says. “Deadly serious. With this Necronomicon I’m giving you students a chance to revive someone.”

“Like...someone who died in the killing game?” Tsumugi asks nervously.

Kaede can hear her heart thud loudly as Monokuma laughs a little too loudly. “I like your cruel way of thinking, Shirogane! Reviving someone only for them to end back up in the killing game. As despairingly delicious as that sounds, I think you should try and think outside the box for a second.”

“So we can revive a student?” Gonta asks hopefully. “Can we bring everyone back-”

“Only one person can be brought back to life,” Monokuma says before a huge grin splits across his face. “And they can be absolutely anyone, regardless of if they’ve died in the game or not.”

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 3 Part 3

Chapter Notes

Sorry this chapter is so long :0 I'm trying to keep them around 10k each but this one is almost double that so take your time reading it ahaha

Thanks to everyone who has left a comment! It means a lot!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

“A book that can raise the dead...”

Kaede bites her lip as Rantaro looks over the book curiously, flipping through the pages.

After Monokuma had given them the newest motive, he left rather quickly. Everyone had been too dumbfounded to do anything for a while. Ryoma had ended up scoffing at the book before leaving, muttering about how the book has to be too good to be true. Tsumugi and Gonta clearly had no idea what to say whilst Korekiyo stared at the book with wide eyes.

Kaede had ended up offering to look after it and no one had the words to argue with her. The first place she went to with the book was obviously Kokichi's room to inform Rantaro about the new motive.

“I don't know, it seems like Monokuma has to be bluffing,” Rantaro says as he passes the book back to her. “After all, raising the dead is something that only happens in fiction.”

“I know that but...” Kaede hugs the book to her chest nervously. “Look what happened when Tojo tried to run away from her punishment. She just...magically appeared somewhere else. I-I know raising the dead should be impossible but...”

Rantaro sighs. “Did anyone say they were interested in using it?”

“Gonta did mention something about bringing a student back but I don't think he actually meant it,” Kaede says. “I don't think Hoshi wants anything to do with it and Shirogane didn't look too convinced about it working either. Shinguji though...”

“No matter what, Monokuma always manages to give us a motive at least one person is interested in,” Rantaro murmurs. “We should probably tell Kiiro about the book too once he turns back on. He's been charging for a couple of hours so he should wake up soon.”

“Ah, that's right. You've both been listening to his audio all night,” Kaede says. “Did you hear anything interesting?”

Rantaro nods groggily as he sits down on Kokichi's bed, placing the bowl of fruit Kaede had given him earlier onto his lap. “We listened to quite a lot last night. I think we listened to an entire class trial. That was certainly...something.”

“What happened?”

“...Hoshi was killed apparently,” Rantaro says. “And Tojo was the culprit. What doesn’t make sense is that...”

Kaede frowns as Rantaro clearly hesitates, refusing to look her in the eye as his hands tighten around the bowl. “Amami, what happened?”

“We heard...” Rantaro’s eyes flicker over to Kiibo. “We heard her get punished. It was a lot different from what happened to her with us. There was a lot of...screaming and...this crunch. I think she fell but...”

Kaede doesn’t realise she’s put a hand to her mouth until she feels her fingers press against her skin. “A-Are you being serious right now? But...”

“It doesn’t make sense, does it?” Rantaro says. “But both Kiibo and I heard her die, Akamatsu. And the trial was for Hoshi too. Oh and to make things even more confusing, all of the graduated students were there. Saihara, Yumeno and Harukawa took part in that trial.”

“Huh?” Kaede blinks. “Wait, wait, wait. But that can’t be right, can it?”

“I don’t know what you want me to say,” Rantaro says. “All three of them were definitely there. Saihara also did a pretty good job of pinning Tojo down as the culprit too. It’s such a shame he isn’t here because if we end up having to do a class trial...”

“Don’t think like that,” Kaede says with a frown. “I won’t let there be a class trial.”

“Even so,” Rantaro sighs before running a hand down his face. “I should probably mention that we heard something else before Kiibo ran out of battery.”

“Oh?”

Rantaro stares at the floor with a grim expression. “Akamatsu, how truthful do you think Shirogane is being right now?”

“What?” Kaede raises an eyebrow. “I don’t think she’s lying about anything anymore. Monokuma forcing her to reveal her true talent really upset her so I doubt she’s hiding anything else. Why?”

“After the trial had finished there was a confrontation,” Rantaro says. “Ouma found out that Harukawa had been lying about her talent and told everyone that she was the Ultimate Assassin. From what it sounded like, I think Harukawa attacked him.”

Kaede is surprised her eyes don’t roll out of her head as they widen. “H-Huh? You’re not serious are you? But...how did Ouma find out?”

“It was something to do with a video,” Rantaro says and lifts up a colourful tablet that he’s sat next to. “I found it after hearing the argument. There’s a tablet for everyone but us two, Akamatsu. I didn’t watch them all but I did watch Harukawa’s tablet and she’s definitely the Ultimate Assassin.”

“I know that,” Kaede says. “Everyone knows that. Monokuma forced Shirogane to-”

“Who I heard wasn’t Shirogane,” Rantaro says firmly. “The girl I heard had a different voice. She sounded...cold. Like how an actual assassin would sound like.”

Kaede scoffs as she furrows her brow. “What, are assassins supposed to sound a certain way or something? If you’re trying to hint that Shirogane is lying about being Harukawa then you’re

wrong. She told me last night that her and the real Shirogane knew each other before the game and said that-”

“Did she now?” Rantaro raises an eyebrow. “Look, I’m not trying to cause trouble but something isn’t adding up, Akamatsu. Isn’t it a little coincidental that the person Shirogane says she is isn’t even here to confirm whether she’s lying or not? I heard Shirogane too in the audio, *our* Shirogane, and she was acting the exact same as she was before she told us she was the Ultimate Assassin.”

“Are you saying Shirogane is lying about being Maki Harukawa?” Kaede asks as an unknown feeling settles in her stomach. “Amami, that’s a bit of a stretch. She literally told me last night about how she and Harukawa were friends before the game. It’s not unreasonable for them both to have known each other beforehand. We don’t know what their relationship was like-”

“We don’t even know if they even had a relationship,” Rantaro says. “Listen, I know you’re friends with her but-”

“You’re accusing her of lying when she’s already been through so much!” Kaede retorts. “What you heard probably sounded really bad but I really don’t think Shirogane would lie about something like this! Why would she? Outing herself as an assassin for absolutely no reason doesn’t make any sense!”

“It does if it means she didn’t have to reveal something much worse,” Rantaro says.

Kaede narrows her eyes as she says, “you seriously don’t think she’s the mastermind, do you?”

“I think she’s lying about something,” Rantaro responds with an irritated sigh. “You were the one who came to me about Kiibo’s audio. Why are you being so hostile just because I found something that doesn’t make sense?”

“I’m not being hostile,” Kaede says. “I just think you’re wrong about Shirogane lying. She’s been through enough. You don’t know enough about her to jump to any conclusions, especially if they’re about her being the mastermind.”

“Well someone here is the mastermind and we’re going to have to start pointing fingers sooner than later,” Rantaro tells her. “If you end up defending everyone then we’re going to get nowhere.”

Kaede knows he has a point. She knows there’s someone lying to everyone every single day about their involvement in the game. She lets out a heavy sigh. “Sorry...”

“I’m not mad,” Rantaro mumbles quietly. “I don’t want to accuse people either but of course I’m going to be suspicious of a lot of things. If we can figure out who the mastermind is then we can end the game before anything else bad happens.”

“...I know you have your doubts about Shirogane but Kiibo must still have loads of audio left to listen to,” Kaede says. “It’s too early to start pointing fingers right away, especially over something that might just be a misunderstanding.”

“There’s no misunderstanding about Maki Harukawa being the Ultimate Assassin,” Rantaro says. “But I’m still sceptical about our Shirogane telling the truth.”

Kaede doesn’t realise she’s rolling her eyes until Rantaro frowns at her. She hugs the Necronomicon even tighter to her chest before saying, “I seriously think you’re just jumping to conclusions but fine, whatever. This doesn’t mean I’m going to stop being friends with her though.”

“If you are going to continue being friends with her then just be careful,” Rantaro tells her and he sounds so sincere that Kaede winces. “Hey, let’s not fall out over this. I just don’t want you to get hurt, Akamatsu.”

“I’m not going to get hurt,” Kaede responds quietly. “And I don’t want to fall out over this either...”

“Ah! Good morning, Akamatsu!”

“Ack!” Kaede jumps as Kiiibo suddenly springs to life, his eyes glowing blue momentarily before going back to normal. “Geez! You scared me!”

“My apologies, I didn’t mean to,” Kiiibo murmurs. “Um...did I miss something? You’re both giving each other funny looks.”

“Don’t worry, everything is fine,” Rantaro reassures the robot. “I was just telling Akamatsu about what we heard last night.”

“Ah yes, I see.” Kiiibo puts a hand to his chin as a conflicted expression takes over his face. “We did hear a lot of unsettling things last night. Did Amami tell you about the class trial we heard? It wasn’t...very nice.”

“Yeah, he did,” Kaede says.

“We also came to the conclusion that the whiteboard in Ouma’s room must be the victims and killers from the last time we were here,” Kiiibo explains as he points to the board. “Well, that’s what we presume anyway since we found out that Tojo did kill Hoshi.”

Kaede shrinks in on herself as she looks at her portrait that’s been placed next to Rantaro’s. “Y-Yeah, seems like it.”

“Obviously what doesn’t make sense is how we clearly heard Tojo die on the audio yet she was here with the rest of us when we all woke up,” Rantaro says.

“Yes, I’m struggling to come up with a logical reason for that too,” Kiiibo admits. “My initial thoughts were that the pictures on the whiteboard represented murder attempts, not actual murders. However, both Amami and I heard the exact same thing.”

“There has to be some sort of explanation,” Kaede says anxiously. “L-Like maybe...maybe Monokuma didn’t actually kill Tojo but just hid her?”

“No, that doesn’t explain how Hoshi is here,” Kiiibo says. “He was Tojo’s victim yet he’s still here. Everyone on the board but the three graduated students are here actually. There is simply no way to explain any of this at the moment.”

“Although maybe Akamatsu is onto something,” Rantaro murmurs. “Maybe...maybe no one has actually died yet and Monokuma has only been letting us believe people have.”

“I fail to believe such an idea,” Kiiibo responds. “Akamatsu literally held Ouma as he died. What would Ouma get out of pretending to be dead? And what about Chabashira? Once again Akamatsu spent time with her before she died.”

Kaede helplessly stares at the floor before saying, “yeah...you’re right. There’s no doubt about it that Ouma and Chabashira are very much dead. As for Tojo...we all saw her body. There was no way she could’ve survived what she went through.”

“How perplexing,” Kiibo sighs. “But now that I’m awake again we can listen to some more audio. I would like to confirm that the pictures on the whiteboard are one hundred percent correct and to also listen out for the mastermind.”

“Yeah, maybe things will make more sense if we listen to some more stuff,” Kaede says. “I think I’ll take over keeping an eye on you, Kiibo. Is that okay with you, Amami? You’re looking really tired. Oh! How about I give you your bedroom key back so you can take a nap? You look like you really need one.”

“Do I really look that bad?” Rantaro sighs but accepts the key anyway. “I’ll be back later, okay? I think I really could do with a couple of hours of sleep at least...”

“Don’t worry, we’ll both be fine!” Kiibo reassures him. “Akamatsu will lock the door as soon as you leave! That’ll put a wall between us and anyone dangerous at least!”

Rantaro looks uncertain but exhaustion wins as he leaves the room with a lazy wave. Kaede follows after him to lock the door. She sighs as she places the Necronomicon down onto the bed and flops down next to it.

“Um, what is that?” Kiibo asks curiously.

“Oh, it’s the new motive,” Kaede says as she rolls her eyes. “Apparently Monokuma thinks he can raise the dead or something...ah.”

Kiibo blinks. “What’s wrong? You don’t actually think Monokuma has such powers, do you? I’ve never heard of anyone ever being brought back from the dead in my entire existence.”

“But it would explain how we’re all here,” Kaede says fretfully, giving the book a scared look. “Hear me out for a second, Kiibo. I’m not saying I believe in magic or anything like that but we’ve already seen Monokuma basically transport Tojo somewhere else entirely. Perhaps there’s a chance that...he really can bring someone back from the dead.”

“I’m amazed you’re even considering that for one second that this is actually a motive,” Kiibo admits. “Robots can be brought back to life using technology but humans? Even I know that once a person is dead then that’s it.”

“I’m just trying to think outside the box,” Kaede says. “Forget logic for just a moment. Monokuma wouldn’t offer us something like this if he couldn’t actually bring someone back, right?”

“I know that Monokuma is very cruel and will do anything to get us to turn to murder,” Kiibo says. “Something tells me that this motive is nothing but a nasty trick that hopefully no one falls for.”

“...I hope no one falls for it too,” Kaede says carefully. “However, I can’t get the idea that we’re missing something very important out of my head. I mean yesterday he asked Shinguji and I if we found any flashlights around the school and admitted that we’re missing some memories. I can remember a lot of things about before I got here but there’s this hazy patch that I can’t remember just before I arrived here.”

“Indeed, I also can’t remember how I got here,” Kiibo says. “One minute I was with my professor and the next I was waking up in some classroom with Ouma.”

“The school was also clearly designed for us since the bedrooms have pictures of us above the doors,” Kaede says. “And I’ve also seen lockers with our names on them.”

“I can see where you’re coming from that we’ve all clearly forgotten something important,” Kiibo

says. "But I don't really know how to go about remembering-"

"Maybe your audio has something important!" Kaede excitedly suggests. "Because this isn't our first time here, right? Monokuma has been hinting that something isn't right and said it was too late to start giving our memories back. At first I thought that perhaps our memories have some sort of time limit but that doesn't seem right. I'm starting to think that maybe he thought it was too late in the game to start returning them. H-He even said that our missing memories are a little out there so-"

"A-Akamatsu! Please calm down!" Kiibo pleads as he holds up his hands in defeat. "Perhaps there might be something on the audio that'll help us but we won't be able to hear if you keep shouting!"

"Whoops, my bad!" Kaede feels her cheeks flush as Kiibo sighs.

"Well, here goes nothing..."

Kiibo presses down on a mechanical part and audio starts to play. Kaede listens carefully as Kiibo pauses and starts the audio at appropriate parts. There's a lot of idle chatter that isn't too important. Kaede holds her hand up when something catches her attention.

"Why was I...at my own funeral?"

"What!? A funeral? You, too, Saihara?"

"It would appear we all remembered the same thing."

Kaede bites down on her lip as she and Kiibo share the same worried yet confused look. She doesn't realise she's gone back to hugging the Necronomicon nervously.

"Maybe we...already dead?"

God, maybe Gonta is right. Maybe we're already dead and we're in hell. I don't know what I did to end up here but it must've been something horrible to have to go through the same hell over and over again it seems.

"It was probably a memory of our school festival or something."

Kaito's suggestion doesn't give Kaede any relief, even if the people in the audio think otherwise. She frowns as the audio continues. She ends up signalling Kiibo to stop.

"I don't understand," Kaede murmurs. "From what it sounds like, they were able to get their memories back using flashlights? I wonder why we haven't found any."

"Perhaps they've all been found already?" Kiibo suggests. "Or they were one time use only? I think we would've found a flashlight by now if they were still here, don't you think?"

"Yeah, probably," Kaede agrees. "And I think Monokuma would've told us about them at least. I'm just confused about what they saw. They were at their own funerals?"

"That's impossible," Kiibo says. "It's more likely that Monokuma has a way of showing people memories that he's created. I'm presuming he's the one responsible for creating the flashlights so he must also be responsible for what's on them, meaning he could've shown the people in the audio anything he wanted."

"But to make them watch their own funeral...why?" Kaede mutters. "Nothing is making any

sense!”

“I have a feeling we’re trying to think of answers for a question that just can’t be answered,” Kiibo says. “Shall I continue the audio?”

“Yeah, maybe that's for the best.”

Kaede spends the rest of the morning listening to Angie start up a student council, which had a lot more members in it than her attempt this time around. To Kaede’s surprise even Kiibo joins it. The robot simply stammers out a weak excuse as to how he could’ve been so influenced by Angie. Kaede finds herself not caring too much but she does shudder every time Angie speaks, a horrible feeling running up her spine.

She doesn’t realise that they’ve both been listening to the audio for quite a while until Kiibo suddenly turns off. Kaede panics for a moment before realising she probably just needs to plug him into his charger. She grunts as she drags him over to the wall and presses the charger into his socket. A moment passes and his eyes light up softly. Kaede sighs in relief.

It’s important for her to stay with Kiibo to keep him safe so she decides to find something to do whilst she waits for either Kiibo to recharge or for Rantaro to wake up. She puts her hands on her hips as she looks around the room for some inspiration.

I have a strong urge to clean the room but I’m not sure if I should move things around too much. Hmm, there’s not really much to actually do here, is there? I suppose the most useful thing I can do right now is maybe go through all those boxes and maybe see what’s been written on all of the paper. After all, there might be something important hidden in all of the mess.

Kaede pumps her fists encouragingly before kneeling down in front of the boxes and starts to go through the papers quietly, humming to herself as she looks at one drawing after another. She quickly notices that a lot of the drawings are rather childish and drawn with crayon. She wonders why such drawings are in the room in the first place.

Now that I’ve got some time to myself maybe I should just sit back and let myself think. I really need a break, after all. I suppose I’ve been going nonstop for so long that I haven’t allowed myself to slow down. However, the thought of just doing nothing and being alone with my own thoughts...

It’s not a pleasant thought. Kaede grimaces as she starts to stack the drawings neatly on top of each other, a little more slower this time. She doesn’t really look at the drawings too much, especially the ones that simply look like colourful scribbles.

What’s the point of all of these drawings? They even confused me the first time I was here and I still haven’t found anything that looks important. Is it that I’m not looking hard enough or is there truly nothing here of worth? I can’t imagine why a supreme leader would have loads of childish drawings in his room without a reason.

She scrunches her nose up at the mess she’s starting to make. Kiibo is probably going to get annoyed with her when he sees what she’s doing. She should probably start cleaning up soon but she can’t stop herself from digging through the papers just a little more.

More than anything she just wants to find something that will actually help, not cause more questions. Kaede knows she isn’t smart, that she’s not cut out for solving mysteries. She’s a pianist for crying out loud! She knows at best she’s just a friendly face. Yeah, maybe she can find some evidence here and there but it’s not like she knows what to do with it.

A small part of her is jealous of how calm and collected Rantaro has been lately. Every time he finds out something new he just rolls along with it. Hell, he even found the second plate of food in the secret room. It just goes to show that he actually knows how to investigate a room properly.

And he knows how to be suspicious of people too. I know that there's someone here lying to my face and probably laughing behind my back right now but even so, I still can't bring myself to distrust anyone! I probably shouldn't have snapped at him about Tsumugi but I still think he's wrong about her. She wouldn't be lying about something so horrible, right? Yeah, there's no way she's the mastermind! She's my friend!

She spends the rest of her time in Kokichi's room waiting for Kiibo to wake up. When he does, Rantaro knocks on the door a couple of moments later with a plate of lunch for her. She ducks her head when he comes into the room and after an awkward pause, decides to leave with the Necronomicon.

I shouldn't have snapped at him earlier. I know I have a tendency to get angry when I hear something I don't want to...I should apologise properly later on.

Ryoma helps her sort out the tennis room during the early afternoon. There's not much to do aside from taking some nets down and turning off the machines, which Ryoma does easily with a press of a button.

"So about the motive," Ryoma grunts with a low voice. "What do you think about it?"

"I really don't know," Kaede admits. The Necronomicon is currently in her backpack. "One half of me knows it's impossible to raise the dead but the other half of me...can't help but believe that Monokuma actually can. A lot of unexplainable stuff has happened here so I really can't tell if Monokuma is bluffing about this motive or not."

"That's true and all but..." Ryoma sighs. "Something tells me that Monokuma is just trying to upset us. After all, I'm pretty sure everyone has someone they want to bring back from the dead for whatever reason."

"I don't know about that," Kaede says, leaning down to pick up a crate of tennis balls. "I mean, all of my family is alive. I have my grandparents, parents and sister. If I had to pick someone to bring back it would be someone who died here but..."

"That would just be cruel," Ryoma says. "Something tells me Monokuma would just make them join the killing game again."

Kaede nods. "Yeah, that's why I would personally not use the Necronomicon. Once someone dies...that's it. I know millions of people would do anything to bring a loved one back but..."

Ryoma clears his throat as he turns his back on Kaede to pick up a couple of tennis balls that are on the floor. "What about bringing someone back who wasn't ready to die yet?"

"Huh? What do you mean?" Kaede asks curiously.

"...forget it," Ryoma mutters. "It's simply wishful thinking-"

"Do you have someone you want to bring back?" Kaede can feel her gaze soften.

"I have a whole bunch of people I would happily die for if it brings them back," Ryoma admits

before tugging on his hat. "But this is the real world and I know that anything involving Monokuma is just going to end in disaster."

"Hoshi..." Kaede fiddles with the straps of her backpack. "I'm sorry-"

"I know you're trying to be nice but I hate being pitied," Ryoma says. "I've had plenty of time to dwell on what ifs. I'd be a fool to use the Necronomicon for my own selfish reasons. The best thing we can do with it is to just get rid of it."

"You're probably right," Kaede admits. "But it shouldn't be up to us to decide what happens to it. We should probably have a vote on whether to use it or not."

"Well you know what my vote is," Ryoma says. "The sooner we get rid of it, the sooner Monokuma will lose control over us."

"I want to get rid of it too," Kaede murmurs. "In fact, I can't think of anyone here who would actually want to use it."

"Better hold the vote though," Ryoma says. "Just in case. At least that way we'll know if we need to keep an eye on anyone in particular."

"That's right, we need to be able to support each other!" Kaede pumps her fists.

"Speaking of support..." Ryoma shuffles uncomfortably, stuffing his hands into his pockets. "I know you don't owe her anything but I've noticed Angie hasn't been eating lately or hasn't been coming out of her room. I'm not expecting you to talk sense into her but I do think she needs someone right now."

"Ah..." Kaede bites her lip. "Gonta mentioned she hasn't been eating this morning too..."

"I'm going to be blunt here," Ryoma says. "But I don't think now is the time to be holding grudges. I don't condone what she did but she's still here and she's still a part of the group. I was thinking of trying to talk to her later on today but it didn't feel right to do so without telling you first."

"You don't need my permission to talk to her," Kaede sighs. "I'm not going to hate you, you know?"

"I expected as much. Still, I thought I should warn you first," Ryoma responds. "I'll make sure to bring up the Necronomicon to her too. She should still get a vote."

"Right..."

"...you're a good person, Akamatsu," Ryoma says. "Just remember that. A lot of people wouldn't be so understanding if they were in your shoes."

"I'd be a huge hypocrite if I judged her," Kaede says quietly.

Ryoma raises an eyebrow but thankfully doesn't pry. "Seems like you're dealing with a lot at the moment. I hope this room gives you the space you need for your neo-aikido practice."

"Thanks..."

"Well, looks like this room is sorted then," Ryoma says. "I'm off. I'll see you around, Akamatsu."

"Yeah, see you later," Kaede responds. "Oh and thanks for the room! I'm really happy that I have

somewhere to use!”

“It was only going to collect dust anyway,” Ryoma murmurs as he gives the room a blank stare. “Glad that it’s not going to go to complete waste though.”

Kaede watches with a small smile as Ryoma leaves before slumping her shoulders forward with a heavy sigh. She can feel the added weight of the Necronomicon in her bag. It’s quite a thick book. She wonders what’s written inside.

Since it’s too late in the day to start exercising she decides to leave. The most she can do right now is probably find someone to spend time with. It’s going to be a while until everyone meets up for another meal and she plans to bring up what to do with the Necronomicon then.

Hmm...I've never really had nothing to do here yet. I guess I can try and find someone to talk to, I suppose. It's not like there's anything I can actually do right now to get everyone out of here. I wonder who is available-

“Ah, Akamatsu. Just the person I was looking for.”

Kaede realises she’s ended up just outside of the piano room. She rubs her cheek bashfully with a finger. No matter what, it seems whenever she’s stressed or lost she always ends up finding a piano. The realisation amuses her.

“Hi Shinguji,” Kaede says. “Is everything okay?”

“Everything is fine, yes,” Korekiyo says before pausing. “Would you like to talk in your piano room? I’d like to have a conversation with you somewhere more private.”

“Sure?” Kaede raises an eyebrow as the two head into the piano room. She takes a seat by her piano whilst Korekiyo sits on a nearby bench, placing his hands down onto his lap. “Hey, are you sure nothing is wrong? You seem nervous.”

“Yes, I think that’s the right word to describe how I’m feeling, I must admit,” Korekiyo says as he tucks a strand of hair behind his ear. “I apologise since this question is coming out of nowhere but do you have any siblings by any chance?”

“Huh? Yeah, I do actually,” Kaede says. “I have a twin sister.”

“A twin sister?” Korekiyo smiles under his mask. “Ah, this is going to make this conversation a whole lot easier then.”

“Um...” Kaede shuffles nervously.

“What is that expression for?” Korekiyo asks. “It’s easier to have a conversation if two people can relate to something, yes? In this case, both of us can talk about the fact that we each have a sister.”

“O-Oh!” Kaede laughs in relief. “For a second I had no clue what you were going to go on about to be honest. So you have a sister too, Shinguji?”

“Well, I suppose ‘have’ is the wrong word. I had a sister,” Korekiyo clarifies. “She unfortunately passed away some time ago.”

Kaede takes a deep breath. “That’s...really sad. I’m sorry.”

“I’m not searching for pity of course,” Korekiyo says. “It was unfortunately her time to go.

However, I do know deep down that if she could've kept on living then she would've. Sister meant a lot to me and I meant a lot to her. I'm sure she...regrets leaving me when she did."

"Shinguji..." Kaede's face falls. "You're not asking for the Necronomicon, are you?"

Korekiyo goes quiet as he idly plays with a strand of hair. "...truthfully, I do not believe that people can be brought back to life. I do think that we can speak to the dead but to bring a person back entirely seems rather absurd to some degree."

"Didn't you mention a while back with the ticket that you'd like to see Monokuma resurrect someone?" Kaede asks with a frown. "Or am I misremembering something?"

"Oh, no, I did say that," Korekiyo answers. "I must admit I was in awe that Monokuma claimed to be able to do such a feat. I have travelled the world and have never heard a single person claim to be able to bring the dead back to life. I am a researcher, Akamatsu. If Monokuma claims he can do something then of course I would like to see him do so."

"He's just bluffing," Kaede mutters. "It's impossible-"

"Yes, bringing the dead back to life should be impossible," Korekiyo murmurs almost breathlessly before his mask twitches. "Yet I witnessed with my very own eyes Tojo teleport somewhere completely new when she opened a door. I understand that magic is practiced in some places but never have I ever seen someone teleport like that. There's no scientific reason to explain what happened to her."

"Do you really think so?" Kaede finds herself asking.

Korekiyo nods. "Like I just said, I do not believe people can be brought back to life. However, the situation we find ourselves in is so bizarre and so...unexplainable that I do think that perhaps Monokuma might have the power to do the unspeakable."

"Are you saying you want to use the Necronomicon for a scientific reason?" Kaede blinks. "Just to test what Monokuma is capable of?"

"From an anthropological view, absolutely," Korekiyo says and Kaede has never heard him sound so excited. "I must admit not many others would share my enthusiasm. I believe some people would think that raising the dead is the utmost disrespect since you'll be disturbing someone's final slumber."

"I-I didn't think about it like that," Kaede says, nervously tapping the piano for comfort. "Shinguji...what does this have to do with your sister though?"

Korekiyo puts his hands to his chest as he says, "like me, my sister was an anthropologist. However, I'm certain she wouldn't like the idea of resurrecting the dead. Due to her always being in a sickly state, she was very sensitive about the topic of death. Despite all this, I don't think she ever thought I'd wind up in a beautiful situation like this, to be able to witness such sights."

Kaede grimaces. "There's nothing beautiful about this situation, Shinguji."

"To you, yes, that is true," Korekiyo says. "But the amount of research I've been able to gather...I'd be a fool to not take advantage of our situation and I'm sure my sister feels the same."

"Can you maybe get to the point?" Kaede asks. "You're really confusing me more than anything."

"Yes, yes, I shall get to the point," Korekiyo says. "I believe from the very bottom of my heart that

my sister wasn't ready to die. Whilst I am very much aware that Monokuma is trying to cause the group to argue over what is to be done with the Necronomicon, I request to have it so I can bring my sister back purely for research purposes."

Kaede sighs as she runs a hand down her face. "Shinguji...I appreciate what you're saying but-"

"You said you have a sister, correct? A twin no less. Imagine if she was torn away from you before she was ready to die," Korekiyo says.

"You told me you want to bring her back for research purposes but I can't help but feel you want her back for personal reasons," Kaede says gently. "Of course I'd do anything to bring my sister back if anything happened to her but nothing has. I'm so sorry about your sister, I really am but...she's gone, Shinguji. I really don't think Monokuma is capable of bringing her back-"

"I beg to differ," Korekiyo says. "I have witnessed far too much to believe Monokuma isn't capable of doing such a feat. In any other situation I would be laughing at the thought of even thinking about resurrecting my sister but-"

"Hoshi and I decided earlier that we should all vote on whether to destroy the Necronomicon or not," Kaede says. "If you care so...passionately about bringing your sister back then you'll be able to have your say later. However, you need to remember the Necronomicon is a motive, not a present. Monokuma isn't offering to raise the dead out of the kindness of his heart, Shinguji. He's trying to get us to argue and tear us apart."

"You're planning to...destroy the Necronomicon?" Korekiyo blinks.

"Only if enough people vote for it to get destroyed," Kaede explains. "Keeping it around is much too dangerous. Listen, I really am sorry about your sister but you need to put yourself first. Your sister wouldn't want you to die here, would she?"

"Of course not," Korekiyo says and Kaede can hear that his voice has gone...cold. "Very well then. I shall plead my case when the voting begins. However, I must ask if I end up being the only one who wants to use it then would you give the book to me?"

"That's not how it works," Kaede says. "We're either destroying the book or keeping it. If we do keep it then you can discuss with everyone else about using it. Until then, I'm going to keep the Necronomicon safe."

"Right..." Korekiyo clears his throat. "My apologies, I wasn't trying to start an argument. Believe me, usually I wouldn't get so...insistent about something like this."

"Then why are you?" Kaede asks as she stands up, sensing that their conversation is over.

"Because," Korekiyo says and spreads his arms out wide. "I'd do anything for my sister."

Kaede returns to the dormitories to check on Rantaro and Kiibo and to also ask them if they want the Necronomicon destroyed or not.

"Of course I want it gone," Rantaro says. "It's not going to work anyway."

"I also agree," Kiibo adds. "Raising the dead is impossible."

"Hmm..." Kaede sits down on the bed with a heavy frown. "Shinguji asked me for the

Necronomicon earlier. He said he wanted to bring his sister back.”

“Is that so?” Rantaro mumbles. “Kiibo and I skimmed through his class trial earlier. We decided not to listen to the whole thing since it went on for a while but once again, the whiteboard is right. He killed both...”

“Angie and Chabashira,” Kaede finishes for him. “Did he say anything about his sister by any chance?”

“We, um, fast forwarded through the end of the trial,” Kiibo admits bashfully. “Neither of us wanted to hear someone die again. In fact, we ended up skipping a lot of the trial since neither of us thought we’d hear anything important and...there was something else worrying us.”

“Huh?” Kaede gives the robot a confused look. “Did something happen?”

“Were you trying to get into the room earlier?” Rantaro asks, giving the door a wary look before looking back at the pianist. “Someone was rattling the door handle for quite a while. Neither of us said anything since we’re not really supposed to be in here but...”

“I-I haven’t been near the dormitories all afternoon,” Kaede reveals anxiously. “And if I needed to get in then I would’ve used the key.”

“That’s what I thought too,” Rantaro says. “Akamatsu, I don’t think we’re safe here anymore.”

“Whoever tried to break in also didn’t say anything either,” Kiibo adds. “I don’t know why they wanted to be in here but on the off chance that they knew that both Amami and I are in here then why didn’t they just call out?”

“I have a feeling that it wasn’t just anyone at the door earlier,” Rantaro says, leaning forward from where’s sitting with a serious expression on his face. “I think the mastermind is after us.”

Kaede almost chokes. “Y-You’re not serious, are you?!”

“How does the mastermind know where we are?” Kiibo also asks.

“...we’ve kept our Monopads on us all this time,” Rantaro realises slowly. “All the mastermind had to do was check the map to know where we were.”

“Ah!” Kaede wants to hit herself for overlooking such a simple thing. “Of course!”

“So does that mean we’re all in danger?” Kiibo asks nervously. “Oh no...”

“I wouldn’t say we’re in danger,” Rantaro murmurs, fiddling with one of his many rings. Kaede can’t tell if he’s telling the truth or trying to keep Kiibo calm. “But I’m not sure if staying in this room is wise. There’s a lot of important stuff in here that needs to be kept safe.”

“Then where should we go?” Kaede asks. “My room is out of the question since I don’t have a door.”

“Should we even stay in the dormitories?” Kiibo adds. “Because the mastermind knows where we’ve been so-”

“Our bedrooms are the only rooms in the entire school that have locks on the doors,” Rantaro says.

“No, that’s wrong,” Kaede says. “The warehouse also has a lock on the door. I had asked Iruma to make one a couple of days ago to make sure no one could get into the warehouse. T-There’s a lot

of stuff in there that could be used as a weapon so I thought sealing the room up altogether would help.”

“Do you have the key for it?” Rantaro asks.

Kaede shakes her head. “No, Shirogane does.”

“Ah...” Rantaro doesn’t look impressed as he fiddles with his ring a little more roughly. “That’s not good...”

Kaede hesitates before saying, “actually, wouldn’t asking Shirogane for help prove that she’s innocent? If she...really is the mastermind then we’ll know for sure because if ask her to let us stay the night in the warehouse and we’re all okay then...”

“That’s too risky,” Rantaro says with a deep frown. “I don’t want either of you to get hurt.”

“Kiibo and I will be fine because Shirogane isn’t the mastermind,” Kaede says. “Seriously, I think this is a good plan! If all three of us stay in the warehouse then-”

“I’m presuming Shirogane is going to keep the key for the warehouse during all of this,” Rantaro says. “Meaning she’ll be the only person who can let us in or out. I really mean it when I say I really don’t trust her at all, Akamatsu. Let’s forget the warehouse altogether and-”

“But asking her for help will prove her innocence!” Kaede insists. “Don’t you see-”

“You’re wrong,” Rantaro snaps and Kaede jumps, taking a step back. “Akamatsu, this isn’t some sort of trust exercise where you have to catch someone. If something goes wrong then someone is going to end up dead.”

“Are you on about me? Am I going to be the one who ends up dead?” Kiibo asks as his eyes go wide. “A-Akamatsu, I’m just as human as you are! Just because I’m a robot doesn’t mean I don’t fear death! I-I don’t want to die!”

“Y-You won’t because...” Kaede takes a deep breath, closing her eyes before exhaling loudly. When she opens her eyes, she hopes the smile that she’s giving Kiibo looks real. “Everything is going to be okay. I’m going to be with you the entire time. I’m not expecting you to go into the warehouse on your own.”

Kiibo doesn’t look convinced. “Um, no offence but how are you going to protect me if something bad does happen? You’re not exactly the strongest person.”

“I’m not going to have to protect you!” Kaede grabs her backpack handles tightly. “Because nothing bad is going to happen. I’ll make sure of it-”

“You seriously don’t expect me to just let you both go in there with Shirogane being the only person who can let you both out,” Rantaro snaps. He runs a hand through his hair. “Absolutely not. If either of you are going anywhere then it’s...it’s my room. We’ll all stay there for the night and think of a new plan in the morning.”

“But we’ll still be in the dormitories,” Kaede says with a frown. “It’s not safe here anymore. Which is why asking Shirogane to let us into the warehouse-”

“No. Absolutely not,” Rantaro argues. “That’s a risk I’m refusing to take-”

“Just because you can’t trust one person?!” Kaede hisses. “I trust her. Is that not enough?!”

Rantaro laughs warily as he shakes his head. “Unbelievable...”

“What? That I’m sticking up for my *friend*?” Kaede asks, crossing her arms angrily. “You heard *one* thing that doesn’t add up but in case you haven’t realised there’s a lot of things that have happened that don’t add up either! Why are you singling her out-”

“There’s no doubt there’s a mastermind here and you know that,” Rantaro says quietly. His eyes narrow as he says, “and out of everyone here, Shirogane has been the one acting the most suspicious. Even Angie thought-”

“Don’t you dare bring Angie into this,” Kaede yells, her face twisting into something angry as she jabs a finger in Rantaro’s direction. “Especially after what she did! The only reason why she tried to kill Shirogane was because of *your* stupid mistake!”

She knows she’s struck a nerve when Rantaro doesn’t have a response. However, she doesn’t feel satisfied. She feels disgusted with herself. Her hand drops to her side and her mouth opens and closes but nothing comes out.

“G-Guys! Please stop arguing!” Kiibo cries out as he stands between the two. “That’s enough! I thought we were a team!”

“W-We are!” Kaede blabbers helplessly. “I-”

“Do you actually blame me for Chabashira and Tojo dying?” Rantaro asks weakly. His face is drained of colour.

“I-I didn’t mean-”

“Of course you meant it,” Rantaro says. “Because it’s true, after all. A lot more people would be alive right now if...if I had just been smarter from the very beginning. I’ve done nothing but mess up ever since waking up here. I couldn’t get the stupid door open, I wasted the ticket and now I can’t even keep you both safe.”

“You’ve done an excellent job making sure Akamatsu and I have been safe,” Kiibo responds with a frown. “Please don’t start beating yourself up over little mistakes-”

“Little mistakes? My negligence has caused several deaths,” Rantaro grits out. “If I got the door in the library open quicker then we would’ve been able to find Ouma quicker and if I hadn’t of used the ticket for such a stupid reason then-”

“That’s enough,” Kiibo says sternly. “You can’t possibly blame yourself for everything that has happened. You didn’t poison Ouma. You didn’t tell Angie to try and kill Shirogane-”

“I could’ve stopped them all from dying though,” Rantaro argues and runs his hands down his face. “So forgive me for trying to keep you both safe. I’m sick of screwing up. I’ve already lost so many people in my life that were, no, are important to me. I...I can’t lose anymore.”

“...Amami, I really didn’t mean what I said,” Kaede softly says. “It just came out-”

“It doesn’t matter, Akamatsu,” Rantaro sighs.

Kaede shakes her head furiously.

I shouldn’t have gotten so angry. I think I’ve pushed him to his breaking point. God, I really am the worst, aren’t I? Of course I don’t blame him for Tenko dying. Or Kirumi. I’m terrified and I don’t

know what to do! I...really want to go home now. If I'm just in some freak nightmare then I'm ready to wake up.

"It does!" Kaede holds a hand to her chest. "Kiibo's right, we're supposed to be a team. Y-You're just trying to keep us safe and I'm making that really hard for you."

Rantaro swallows before going back to playing with his rings. "We've all known each other for the same amount of time...I can understand why you can't help but trust everyone at the moment..."

"...Shirogane was the first person I bumped into when I woke up here," Kaede admits gently. "I guess because of that I have a bit of a soft spot for her."

"And you're the first person I saw too," Rantaro says. "Since you were standing in front of Shirogane. The first thing I thought when I saw you was 'wow, I really hope I don't get on her bad side.'"

Kaede snorts into the back of her hand. "Was I really that intimidating?"

"I thought you were going to bite my head off at first," Rantaro admits before a distant look appears in his eyes. "I'm glad you gave me a chance though."

"Um..." Kiibo presses his fingers together. "Are you both friends again? I'm struggling to keep up with you both."

"We never stopped being friends," Kaede says. "I guess I can just get a little stubborn sometimes."

"That's not a bad thing. Although being on the wrong side of you is a little scary," Rantaro admits.

"I-I'm not that scary, am I?" Kaede asks, failing to stop herself from smiling.

"Actually, Akamatsu, I must admit I do find you very scary. Especially when you're arguing with someone," Kiibo blurts out as he squeezes his hands together nervously. "I'm very glad I've not been on your bad side."

Kaede laughs hesitantly. Despite the very sincere look on Kiibo's face she can't help but feel amused. "Don't worry, Kiibo. I'm sure you'll never get on my bad side."

"But you just had an argument with Amami and he's very nice," Kiibo says with a pout. "I'm glad we've never had to have a class trial yet because I'd be terrified to argue against you."

"Yeah, I'm really glad too," Kaede murmurs, uncomfortably shifting her weight from one foot to the other. "Let's try our best to keep everyone alive from now on."

"Hopefully we'll find solid evidence of who the mastermind is soon so we can confront them," Rantaro says. He doesn't look Kaede in the eye as he says this and she wonders what he really meant is that hopefully they'll find actual evidence of Tsumugi being the mastermind soon.

Kiibo tilts his head to the side. "Um, but how is that going to work? I don't think the mastermind is going to stop the game if we just ask them to."

"Of course I'm not naïve enough to think that things are going to go easy," Rantaro says. "But once we know who Monokuma's partner is then that means that the mastermind and Monokuma are going to have less power over us. My only fear is Motherkuma. She's able to make as many Monokumas as she wants. Which reminds me, we should find out how she makes a new Monokuma. That'll help us in the long run."

“So we’re going to have to go back down into the room...” Kaede grimaces. “What if she gets mad at us and decides to actually ban us or hurt us...”

“Let’s not worry about that for now,” Kiibo says. “There’s no use worrying about problems that might not even happen. For now, shouldn’t we be moving to a safer location? I’m starting to feel uncomfortable being in this room.”

“Ah, you’re right.” Rantaro’s eyes flicker over to Kaede momentarily. “For now, I think it’s for the best if we all stay in my room just for the night. All three of us. Akamatsu and I can take turns staying awake and keeping guard.”

“...if you think that’s for the best,” Kaede agrees slowly. “And if nothing bad happens?”

“We’ll find another safe space to go to,” Rantaro says. “But for now I think my room might be the safest place to be at the moment. I’ll be the one looking after my bedroom key too.”

“So you’ll be the person who will be letting us in and out of your room,” Kiibo says. “I see.”

“Whilst it’s important for us to move somewhere safe, I think people are starting to get suspicious about where you’ve both been,” Kaede points out. “There’s also going to be a meeting about the Necronomicon soon. I know listening to Kiibo’s audio is very important right now but I think that you should both come with me to dinner so people don’t start to worry.”

“Very well then,” Kiibo agrees. “It’s about time we all had a break anyway. I suppose it won’t hurt to show our faces at the very least.”

“Hoshi did ask why neither of us are at the dining hall together anymore too,” Rantaro says. “He thought we got into an argument or something.”

“I mean...” Kiibo rolls his eyes. “You both did just-”

“I know, I know,” Kaede sighs. “We should probably set off soon then. The sooner we get the meeting over and done with, the sooner we can start listening to the audio again.”

As Kaede predicted, no one but Korekiyo wants to keep the book.

She’s mildly surprised to see both Angie and Kaito show up to the meeting. Angie is practically hiding behind Gonta whilst Kaito is trying his best to act like he’s okay but his face is shiny with sweat.

“Tch, I’m surprised you didn’t just get rid of the book in the first place, Kaede,” Kaito grumbles as he gives the Necronomicon a glare. “Monokuma is just screwing around. Wish he would just quit it already.”

“Gonta sad we can’t bring everyone back but if everyone think book is bad then Gonta agrees,” Gonta says as he puts a hand to his chin. “Gonta not ever heard of someone coming back from the dead too so Gonta starting to think Monokuma is just trying to trick us!”

“Every one of his motives has been a trick from the start,” Ryoma sighs.

“Even the time limit?” Kaede asks curiously.

Ryoma pauses. “No, I don’t think he was bluffing about that one.”

“So we’re going to destroy the Necronomicon?” Tsumugi asks curiously, placing her hands into her lap. “Who’s going to be responsible for that? After all, I don’t think Monokuma is going to be happy with us if we destroy his motive. He might even give us another one...”

“That is true,” Rantaro says. He taps the table with a finger over and over again. “Perhaps it might be better if we have someone hide the book.”

Kaede sneaks an uncomfortable glance over at Korekiyo. He’s the only person who wants to use the book so it’s clear when Rantaro says to hide the book he means to hide it from Korekiyo. “I can do that.”

Korekiyo scoffs. “I really don’t see the harm of you all just simply handing the book over to me. If absolutely none of you want to use it then why can’t I use it? The amount of research that can be acquired from using the book would be-”

“Shinguji, we made it clear from the very beginning that the book is either going to be used or not,” Ryoma says. “No one but you wants to use it. I’m sorry that you’re going to miss out on some research but keeping everyone alive is much more important.”

“It’s not just about the research,” Korekiyo hisses before taking a deep breath. “I intend to bring my sister back, if possible. She...she wouldn’t want me to miss an opportunity like this-”

“Gonta thought Shinguji would not believe in stuff like this,” Gonta says. “Gonta heard Shinguji talk about his, um, research stuff before and he said bringing dead people back is impossible.”

“I know I might’ve said that once before but circumstances have changed,” Korekiyo responds. “You’ve all seen what Monokuma is capable of. I’m not sure if he’s being controlled by some sort of dark magic or-”

“He’s a robot,” Ryoma says dryly. “I doubt there’s any magic controlling him at all.”

“That’s right! As a robot myself I would know if magic is controlling me,” Kiibo says, lifting up a finger as he explains. “And I am highly certain that I am not magic.”

“Then perhaps Monokuma himself is the one capable of magic,” Korekiyo argues. “But wouldn’t it be interesting to research how a person acts when they’re brought back from the dead? I know my sister would happily-”

“I’m sorry that you lost your sister but let her rest,” Ryoma says and Korekiyo snaps his head to stare at him. “You may think you’re doing her a favour by bringing her back but no one knows what happens once someone dies. For all you know she might come back traumatised-”

“I know what my sister wants,” Korekiyo abruptly says. “She’d do anything to be reunited with me.”

Rantaro clears his throat uncomfortably. “Shinguji, buddy, it’s starting to feel like you want to bring her back because of what you want. There’s no way for you to know what a dead person wants.”

“And knowing Monokuma there’s probably going to be some sort of catch,” Tsumugi adds. “Like...maybe when she wakes up she doesn’t remember you?”

A spark of anger flashes in Korekiyo’s eyes. “There’s no evidence to say that’s true-”

“There’s also no evidence saying otherwise either,” Ryoma cuts in, narrowing his eyes. “We don’t

know what this book is capable of. Shirogane might be right in saying that there might be some sort of catch. I highly doubt Monokuma is going to bring someone back for free.”

“That right, book is motive,” Gonta says. “And motive can’t hurt us if we ignore it so-”

“I simply can’t comprehend why you’re all being so selfish,” Korekiyo says as he crosses his arms. “Have any of you even read the book? I’m certain the Necronomicon has instructions inside on how to use it. I don’t see the problem of me bringing my sister back if we just read what’s inside and-”

“Shinguji, it’s not about what you want.” Kaede takes a deep breath. “It’s about keeping everyone safe and the only way to do that is to just ignore the motive altogether. I’m really sorry-”

“Very well then.”

“Huh?” Kaede blinks as Korekiyo ignores the entire room that’s staring at him incredulously to instead focus on his bowl of soup. “You’re...giving up?”

“Why? Do you want me to continue to argue?” Korekiyo asks. “It’s clear you’re not going to hand the book over so it’s clear that there’s no reason to continue the conversation.”

Kaede’s lips go thin as she sucks in a breath, giving the rest of the room an uncertain look. “R-Right. If you all trust me then I’ll hide the Necronomicon when I have the chance.”

“Oh! Gonta know lots of good hiding places!” Gonta’s eyes light up. “There’s the small hole in the tree in the room full of bugs! Oh! And Gonta knows somewhere else that-”

“The whole point of hiding something is so it can’t be found,” Ryoma sighs. “Are you sure you don’t want someone else to hide the book, Akamatsu?”

“Pfft, like hiding a book can be that hard,” Kaede says, waving a hand absentmindedly. “Don’t worry, everyone. I’ll make sure to find somewhere perfect to put it.”

“Very well, if that’s everything then I shall take my leave,” Kiibo says before pouting. “I wish I could eat food too. Everything that you all eat looks so delicious. If only the professor gave me an eating function...”

“Does not being able to eat upset you?” Gonta asks curiously. “What about oil? Can you not drink that?”

Kiibo bristles as an annoyed look appears on his face. “I-I’m not sure if you’re trying to be robophobic or not! The stereotype that robots drink oil is not true!”

“He didn’t mean to offend you,” Ryoma sighs since Gonta looks like he’s seconds away from crying. “Isn’t that right?”

“Gonta no mean to upset Kiibo! Gonta just trying to help!” Gonta responds.

“Oh, I see...” Kiibo pauses. “My apologies. I suppose I am sensitive to the fact that I’m always going to be different from everyone else.”

“What’s wrong with being a little different?” Tsumugi asks. “It would be boring if everyone was the same, right?”

“That’s...” Kiibo hesitates. “I suppose that is true.”

“Well, I’m done with my food so how about we leave together?” Rantaro suggests as he stands up, giving Kiibo an expectant look. “I have something I want to talk to you about anyway.”

“Why have you both been so absent lately?” Tsumugi suddenly asks. She flushes when everyone looks at her. “I-I’m not trying to accuse either of you of anything but...”

“Are you both planning something?” Ryoma asks.

“No, of course not,” Rantaro responds reassuringly. “I’ve not been feeling well recently and Kiibo has been looking after me, that’s all. I just wanted to thank him.”

“In private?” Tsumugi blinks. “Um...”

“You guys, you’re making a big deal out of nothing,” Kaede sighs. “Go on, you both leave if you’re done.”

Rantaro shoots Kaede a grateful look as he all but drags Kiibo out of the room. She’ll go and check on them both later. First she needs to finish her meal and not cause any suspicion before finding somewhere to hide the Necronomicon.

Actually, all those papers in Kokichi’s room gave me an idea. I know there has to be something important hiding amongst all the drawings. I think there’s something hidden in plain sight! However, there’s so much paper to go through that even if someone knows something is hidden in the papers, they’d probably give up searching through them after a while. That’s why I think the best place for me to hide the Necronomicon is in the library! I’ll find some books that look similar to the Necronomicon and hide it between them.

“Oh, Kaede!”

“Ah, Momota!” Kaede jumps. “Is everything okay? Actually, are you okay?”

“Me? Yeah, I’m fine!” Kaito waves a hand reassuringly. “I just had a cold, that’s all. Anyway, I heard from Maki that you trained with her last night! Nice going, sidekick!”

“Well, it’s not like I had anything better to do,” Kaede says, scratching her cheek.

Kaito smiles. “I’m glad to see that the two of you are friends again! That reminds me, I’m going to be training tonight with her. Are you joining us?”

“Ah, as much as I would love to...” Kaede smiles awkwardly. “I’m kinda busy tonight. Sorry!”

“Busy? With what?”

“That’s...” Kaede swallows. “Stuff. Things. Um...”

Kaito narrows his eyes before a large grin grows on his face. “I know what you’re up to!”

“Huh?!”

“You’re...meeting someone in secret!” Kaito says a little too loudly. “You’re going on a date!”

“How did you even come to *that* conclusion?!” Kaede hides her face in her hands.

“Well don’t girls get all shy and defensive about going on dates?” Kaito asks, tilting his head to the side. “And to skip training with me means you’re doing something really important!”

“You think too highly of yourself,” Kaede grumbles. “I-I’m not...”

“Is that why Amami and Kiibo left so suddenly?” Tsumugi asks with shiny eyes. “Ah! Everything is starting to make sense now!”

“I really don’t know what you’re both on about...” Kaede slumps down into her chair. She would be over the moon if the floor suddenly opened up and swallowed her whole. “You’re both just-”

“Dating in a situation like this is just asking for trouble,” Ryoma sighs. “And I don’t think Akamatsu is the type of person who would welcome that sort of trouble.”

Ryoma suddenly becomes Kaede’s favourite person as she says, “that’s right! Seriously, you’ve both got the wrong idea. I really do have some stuff I need to be doing tonight and that’s why I can’t join you both. Maybe I can tomorrow but not tonight...”

“Oh, I see...” Tsumugi looks disappointed as she readjusts her glasses. “Sorry, Akamatsu! I didn’t mean to embarrass you!”

“So...you’re not seeing anyone?” Kaito asks slowly before draping his arms over the back of his chair. “You know...I have a certain type, if you get me?”

“Uh huh.” Kaede tries her best to look unimpressed whilst trying to hide her amusement.

“Yeah, I totally do,” Kaito says as he glances up at the ceiling. “My type...has a first name starting with a K and they have purple eyes...they’re a little smaller than me and have one hell of an attitude...they also have white sleeves-”

Kaede snorts behind her hand. “If you’re trying to flirt with me then I’m not interested.”

“I-I wasn’t trying to flirt,” Kaito insists. “I just-”

Tsumugi starts to laugh loudly, eyes watering as she says, “I’m sorry but this is just too funny! Aw, Momota! I didn’t know you had a little crush on Akamatsu!”

“I-I do not!” Kaito huffs. “I think Kaede is a very nice girl but-”

“Do you...do you not like me?” Kaede asks, giving Tsumugi a grin as Kaito starts to wave his hands around frantically. She probably shouldn’t be wasting time messing with Kaito but...

“Oh, no! I totally like you! In fact I’m the president of the ‘I love Kaede fanclub!’” Kaito announces.

“Can Gonta join?” Gonta suddenly asks. “Gonta loves Akamatsu too! He think she’s been trying very hard to look after us all so Gonta really likes her!”

“Of course you can join!” Tsumugi says, giggling when Kaito splutters.

Ryoma sighs but Kaede can see the small smile he’s trying to hide. “And here I thought the meeting was going to be a disaster.”

Kaede’s giggles die down when she sneaks a quick glance at Korekiyo, who is still eating his soup and ignoring the chaos opposite him. “I’m glad that mostly everyone is in agreement that using the book would be a disaster. I just hope that Shinguji...”

“Don’t worry too much about him,” Ryoma reassures her. “There’s not much he can do at this point and it looks like you have plenty of people willing to stick up for you if anything does

happen.”

Kaede feels warm when she sees Kaito and Gonta bickering whilst Tsumugi laughs at them both. Her smile drops a little when she sees Angie staring into her bowl of soup. It looks like she hasn't even had a drop of it. The pianist clears her throat before saying, “the soup is really delicious, you know?”

It takes Angie a couple of moments to realise Kaede's talking to her. She looks startled and ready to bolt at any moment. The artist lowers her head and shrinks in on herself.

“Angie...” Kaede murmurs.

“Leave her, I'll make sure she doesn't leave without eating something,” Ryoma says. “You should go and hide the book whilst everyone is distracted. I'll make sure no one leaves the room for a while.”

“You're a lifesaver,” Kaede responds, scooping up the book and hugging it to her chest. She gives the tennis player one last grateful look before leaving the room, feeling a little more confident now that things are looking up.

She hides the Necronomicon in the library and heads to Rantaro's room. She's got a fresh set of pyjamas in her backpack as well as a pillow and duvet tucked under her arm. She makes sure no one is watching as she knocks on his door and waits patiently.

When she's let inside she instantly notices that Kiibo is charging. She clears her throat as she sets her pillow and duvet onto the couch.

“You can have the bed, you know?” Rantaro quickly says as Kaede flops down onto the couch.

Kaede shakes her head. “I can't take your bed! I'll be fine for just one night. I hate to admit it but the couches here are actually quite comfy.”

Rantaro doesn't say anything for a moment before quickly accepting defeat. “Well if you want to swap then just say so. I've had plenty of experience sleeping on couches.”

“Really? How come?”

“I travel a lot,” Rantaro explains. “Some places I go to don't have the best things to sleep on so...”

“If you can afford to travel a lot then wouldn't you have enough money to at least pay for a nice room?” Kaede asks before realising how presumptuous she sounds.

Rantaro laughs. “You would think so but some places I had to go to didn't exactly offer nice places to stay. I slept wherever I could.”

“Why did you travel so much?” Kaede turns around on the couch to give him an inquisitive look. “If you don't mind me asking?”

“I...” Rantaro clears his throat. “That's a story for another day. Sorry. It's nothing personal.”

“Oh, that's fine...” Kaede licks her lips nervously. “So about earlier...”

“A lot of things were said,” Rantaro says quietly. “It's probably for the best if we just pretend that argument never even happened. If you're worried that I don't like you anymore then don't.”

“It’s not that.” Kaede taps the back of the couch with her fingernails. “I said some horrible things to you. I really am sorry, Amami. You shouldn’t forgive me right away just to make things easier. I know that I really hurt you so...”

“I’m not the type of guy to hold grudges so easily,” Rantaro says, spinning a ring around on his finger. “I prefer to forgive and forget when appropriate. I just...really want you to realise that I’m only trying to look out for the group. I don’t want to doubt Shirogane just as much as you. Things would be a whole lot easier if Monokuma was the only bad guy we have to look out for.”

“Yeah, things really would be easier,” Kaede says bitterly. “I’m sorry for getting so defensive all the time. I just can’t doubt people like you can.”

“That’s because you always see the good in people,” Rantaro says. “I can’t help but doubt every person I meet. Especially in a situation like this. As much as I want to think that everyone is my friend here...”

“Someone’s lying to us,” Kaede finishes for him. “And they’re lying really well.”

Rantaro sighs heavily. “A sane person wouldn’t be able to act this well. Whoever the mastermind is has to be really dangerous. There’s no telling what they’re capable of. I can’t imagine things are going to be pretty when we figure out their identity.”

“You don’t think they’ll try to hurt anyone, do you?”

“That’s...a possibility,” Rantaro reluctantly admits. “Unfortunately for us we have no way of knowing how they’ll react. There’s a possibility that Kiibo might have something in his audio but...”

“...I hate this,” Kaede mumbles, flopping her face into the top of the couch. “What did we all do to end up here? I don’t understand...”

“Me neither,” Rantaro agrees. “But we can’t give up just yet, Akamatsu. There’s a way to stop this game and we’re going to figure it out, okay?”

“I hope so.” Her voice is muffled against the cushions. “I miss my parents and my sister. God, I miss them all so much. I can’t die here, Amami. There’s so much I still want to do with them.”

“Akamatsu...”

Kaede doesn’t realise he’s moved until there’s a hand holding her own. She lifts her head up from the back of the couch to see him crouching down in front of her. The warmth of his hand...fills her with reassurance.

“I’m not the type of guy to say empty promises but when I say that I’ll try my best to get everyone out of here, I really do mean it.” Rantaro grips her hand a little tighter. “I have family I want to see too. Twelve little sisters. I’d do absolutely anything to see them again. I refuse to die here without seeing them at least one last time.”

“Twelve little sisters, huh?” Kaede smiles softly. “I don’t think I’ve ever met someone with that many siblings. I’m surprised your talent isn’t being the Ultimate Big Brother or something.”

“More like the Ultimate Useless Brother...” Rantaro smiles ruefully. “Even then that title would be too kind.”

“What on earth are you on about?” Kaede frowns. “I bet you’re a wonderful big brother! My sister

and I love each other but we argue a lot. You don't seem like the type of person to snap at your siblings."

"Of course I scold them if they've done something wrong but..."

"Ahaha! I knew it! You're just a big softie, aren't you?" Kaede smirks. "I bet you let them get away with a lot of things, don't you?"

"W-Well there's no point getting them into trouble when they're just kids," Rantaro mumbles. "My dad isn't the most forgiving person. He thinks he has some sort of image to maintain so he can be strict when he wants to be..."

Kaede swallows, sensing that she's going to be walking on eggshells soon. She clears her throat. "At least they have you then, right?"

"Yeah..." Rantaro looks distracted. "They will as soon as I..."

I can practically hear how desperate he is to get out of here and I can't blame him. If I had that many younger siblings waiting for me then I'd want to leave as soon as possible too. The fact he hasn't snapped yet is actually amazing. He must be the most patient guy alive. Well, he must be since he's been dealing with me and my shit. Great, now I feel even more guilty...

Kaede's eyes go wide as Rantaro suddenly holds her hand a little more firmly, giving her fingernails a peculiar look. "Um..."

"Your nails have been painted with a French slant," Rantaro says. "Huh..."

"What's wrong?"

"It's nothing, I think..." Rantaro pauses. "I used to paint my little sister's nails all the time. Since a lot of them chewed their nails a lot I got pretty good at painting nails with a French slant. It would make their nails look longer. I wonder if..."

"Huh? I didn't even realise my nails were painted," Kaede admits, lifting up her free hand and giving it a hard look. "I rarely paint them so I wonder when I..."

Rantaro sighs. "Sorry for getting distracted. I just found it amusing that your nails have been painted this way, that's all."

"If I had some nail polish on me then you could've redone them if you had wanted," Kaede says. "What a shame."

"Nah, they look nice as they are," Rantaro says. "Whoever picked the colours for you did a pretty good job."

Kaede's face scrunches up in thought as she says, "I just wish I could remember who painted them. I certainly didn't and I don't remember going out to get them done..."

"Well it's certainly a mystery but there's a lot more things we should probably be focussing on right now," Rantaro says. He gives Kaede's hand one last squeeze. "So-"

"Actually, there's something I do want to ask you," Kaede admits hesitantly. "It's about your talent."

"What about it?"

“Are you sure you don’t remember it?” Kaede asks. “There’s something bugging me if I have to be honest. I overheard you arguing with Monokuma the other day and I remember the topic of your talent being brought up...”

“Ah, so you heard that...” Rantaro pulls a face.

“I won’t lie, I’ll be a little upset if you have been...lying about your talent. Especially since I gave Shirogane such a hard time about her lying,” Kaede admits. “But so much has happened since then and I’m too tired to hold a grudge. So if...if you really do know what your talent is then please...can you just tell me?”

Rantaro pulls his hand away with a sigh and Kaede instantly finds herself missing his warmth. “Truth is, I don’t remember how I got my talent. If you’re that desperate to know then I’m the Ultimate Survivor. I suppose I should’ve told you a while back but...”

“Ultimate...Survivor?” Kaede blinks. “That’s...”

“Don’t ask me what my talent actually means because even I don’t know,” Rantaro explains, furrowing his brow. “I just remember waking up and knowing that I was the Ultimate Survivor. I know it doesn’t make any sense but...I felt there was no point telling people what my talent was when even *I* don’t understand it.”

“Did you maybe survive something unbelievable?” Kaede suggests.

Rantaro shakes his head. “Nah. I’ve gotten myself into a fair share of sticky situations but nothing special. I truly mean it when I say I have no clue why that talent belongs to me.”

“...I see,” Kaede says gently. “Well, thank you for finally telling me.”

“I know this means nothing but I also got this really strong gut feeling to not tell anyone about my talent either,” Rantaro admits. “I-I know that makes me look really suspicious but imagine how people would’ve felt if they knew what my title is and then found out I was going to be in a killing game with them.”

Kaede’s eyes go wide. “They would’ve seen you as an easy target, wouldn’t they? If we were put in with a rougher group of people then they would’ve...tried to get you out of the way.”

“I’m not asking you to be sympathetic, hell, I don’t expect you to be,” Rantaro says. “But I truly didn’t want to tell anyone who I am just in case...”

“...you and Shirogane are kinda similar,” Kaede mumbles. “Both of you have talents that would get you targeted in a killing game.”

“At least Shirogane knows how she got her talent,” Rantaro mutters. “I don’t...”

“So you just woke up with it?” Kaede runs her finger along the top of the couch as she thinks. “Hmm...maybe Monokuma knows something? I’m not saying we ask him outright since I know he won’t give us a straight answer but...”

“It wouldn’t surprise me,” Rantaro sighs. “But I’d really appreciate it if you didn’t tell anyone just yet. I’d...I’d like to know a little more about my talent before telling people.”

“...okay, I can do that.” Kaede shuffles to get more comfortable.

“Thank you. Seriously, thank you.” Rantaro slumps his head back in relief. “Wow, it kind of feels

like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders now.”

“I find talking always helps,” Kaede says. “I’m glad you’re feeling better.”

Rantaro hums and Kaede watches as he shuffles back onto his bed, sitting on the edge of it carefully. “Hey, Akamatsu? Do you think we did the right thing earlier by not letting Shinguji use the book? No matter how much I know hiding it was the right thing to do I can’t help but think that...”

“Yeah, I feel guilty too,” Kaede admits. “But the risks outweigh the benefits. Knowing Monokuma there’s going to be some catch if we use the stupid book. Shinguji might hate us for a while but...”

“Don’t you think he’s acting a little strange though?” Rantaro asks. “I mean, it’s not like I know him very well but I didn’t think an anthropologist would actually think the Necronomicon works.”

“I think he’s...really desperate,” Kaede says. “I think the Necronomicon struck a nerve with him and he’s decided to throw all logic out of the window. He says that he wants to bring his sister back for research reasons but...”

“He must be really lonely,” Rantaro says. “Poor Shinguji.”

“If circumstances were any different then I would’ve loved to help him reunite with his sister but we have to put ourselves first,” Kaede says sadly. “And I know that sounds selfish but...his sister is already dead and we’re alive. I-I can’t risk my life for a dead person.”

“No one is expecting you to,” Rantaro reassures her. He jumps when Kiibo’s eyes light up before relaxing. “Ah, Kiibo’s charged up again.”

“Great! Then that means we can listen to more audio!”

Kiibo takes a couple of minutes to boot up. Once he’s more aware of his surroundings, he offers both Rantaro and Kaede a smile.

“Good evening! Um, actually what time is it?” Kiibo asks curiously.

“It’s not too late,” Kaede answers. “Amami and I haven’t been talking for too long so it’s not like you’ve been turned off for that long.”

“Excellent!” Kiibo tilts his head to the side. “Um, did I miss something? You both seem...”

“Kiibo,” Kaede sighs. “We’ve not been arguing again if that’s-”

“No, I was going to say that you both seem very...comfortable,” Kiibo says. “I’m glad to see that you’ve both made up. At least...that’s what I assume anyway.”

“We never fell out in the first place,” Rantaro responds. “But thanks, Kiibo.”

“Well, I suppose the sooner we start the sooner we’ll get to the end of my audio,” Kiibo says. “Although I am slightly worried since we’ve been fast-forwarding through a lot of it.”

“No offence, Kiibo, but a lot of the audio hasn’t been all that helpful,” Rantaro replies. “It’s been mostly you talking to people and not to be rude but your conversations haven’t exactly been...insightful.”

Kiibo pouts. “Are you saying I’m boring?”

“I think he’s saying that there’s a lot more important things we could be listening to,” Kaede says. “How far into the audio are you now anyway?”

“I think we’re about to start the fourth trial soon?” Rantaro says as he puts a hand to his chin. “At least that’s where I remember where we got up to.”

“You’re correct,” Kiibo reassures him. “Iruma has just died and we’re going to briefly listen through the trial to see if Gonta is the killer.”

Kaede winces, clutching her arm. “I can’t imagine someone like Gonta killing for any sort of reason. I wonder what pushed him to the edge?”

“Well we’re about to find out,” Rantaro murmurs, draping his blanket around his shoulders and turning to face Kiibo. “I’m ready when you both are.”

“Ah, let me just get my pyjamas on,” Kaede says as she picks up her backpack. “There might be a small chance I’ll accidentally fall asleep so…”

Rantaro gives her a lazy smile. “Don’t worry, I’ll stay up if that happens.”

“But you already stayed up the entire night last night with Kiibo…” Kaede bites her lip. “Don’t overwork yourself, okay?”

“And what about me?” Kiibo huffs. “I’m the one doing all the work here!”

“Yeah but you can recharge,” Kaede says before quickly walking into the bathroom when Kiibo starts accusing her of being robophobic. She can hear Rantaro chuckle as she closes the door.

Kaede does end up falling asleep on the couch during the early hours of the morning. It’s around halfway through the trial and she’s thoroughly confused. She can’t help but feel grateful that at least someone like Shuichi was with everyone during the last game. She falls asleep to him slowly solving a very confusing puzzle.

(She wakes up briefly a little later on. She realises that her duvet has been placed on top of her. She falls asleep feeling a happy warmth, completely missing Kiibo’s audio that is still playing in the background.)

The next time she wakes up it is to the sound of the morning announcement. She jumps when she hears someone groan and sits up abruptly, only to realise that the cause of the groan was from Rantaro complaining about Monokuma waking him up.

She feels a little guilty when she sees him lying on the bed and wonders how much sleep he’s managed to get.

“Good morning,” she calls out quietly.

“...Akamatsu?” Rantaro says, voice thick with sleep. “Ah, sorry. I forgot you were here.”

“Geez, did you even get any sleep?” Kaede huffs. “That’s it, you’re staying in bed today. No arguing! I’ll bring you some breakfast after I do my exercises, okay?”

“You’re seriously exercising this early?” Rantaro mutters into his pillow. “Hey, is Kiibo

charging?”

“Yeah, he’s charging,” Kaede says. “Seriously, what time did you both stop listening? I didn’t actually think you’d stay up all night.”

“The audio needed listening to,” Rantaro mumbles. “And someone had to keep an ear out for the mastermind.”

Kaede bites her lip. “I...actually forgot about them.”

“We literally moved rooms because of them,” Rantaro sighs before sitting up. “Wait, did you say you’re leaving?”

“Yeah, to exercise,” Kaede says before raising an eyebrow. “Is that a problem?”

“...it shouldn’t be,” Rantaro says slowly. “But take your tablet with you so I can track where you are. Not in a creepy way, of course. Just in case...you know...”

“Got it!” Kaede pumps her fists. “Oh, but I’m going to need your key to leave.”

“I’ll let you out,” Rantaro sighs, wrapping himself tightly in his blanket as he stands up. “Do you want to get changed first?”

“I’m gonna get some fresh clothes from my room and change in Hoshi’s shower room,” Kaede responds. She frowns at his dishevelled appearance. “Seriously, you look exhausted...”

“I’m fine...” Rantaro unlocks the door for her, yawning as Kaede exits the room. “I doubt the mastermind is going to do something so early in the morning and since the morning announcement has played everyone should be up so...”

“I’ll be safe, don’t worry,” Kaede says, giving him an encouraging smile. “Seriously, relax!”

Rantaro gives her a look before sighing, waving her off as he locks his bedroom door once more.

Kaede heads to her room and grabs a set of new clothes. On her way out of her room, she spots Ryoma and gives him a small wave. “Hoshi! I’m just on my way to do some neo-aikido in your lab!”

“Is that so?” Ryoma gives her a nod. “Glad you’ve got somewhere new to exercise.”

“Me too!”

“Have fun then,” Ryoma says. “I’m making breakfast this morning so make sure to come down for something later on.”

“I will, don’t worry!” Kaede gives him a wave before dashing off, only realising when she’s halfway up the stairs in the school that she probably looks like a mess right now. Truthfully, her appearance doesn’t bother her too much and she happily enters the tennis room, zipping open her backpack in the process and pulling out her clothes.

She changes in the shower room and she’s in the middle of buttoning up her shirt when she hears the door to Ryoma’s lab open. She pauses and looks down at her Monopad, frowning when it only shows her icon in the tennis room. Her buttoning slows and she hesitantly creaks the door open and peers into the room.

It doesn’t take long to spot Korekiyo standing in the middle of the room, looking around curiously.

Kaede frowns when she notices that he's not facing her direction.

I wonder what he wants? I hope he isn't going to bother me about the Necronomicon again. I really feel for him, I do. It's just...I need to put the group's safety first.

"Are you looking for me?" Kaede asks as she steps out of the shower room, tucking her shirt into her skirt in the process. Korekiyo turns around and Kaede instantly notices that he's not wearing his mask. "Um..."

His lips are painted a ruby red and his eyes look a little brighter. "Ah, you must be Akamatsu. I was told you'd be up here."

Kaede isn't sure if she's more surprised by his face reveal or the fact his voice sounds a little higher. "Shinguji, is everything okay?"

"I do not wish to alarm you but you're not talking to Korekiyo, sweetheart," he (she?) says. Korekiyo takes a step forward and Kaede takes a step back. "Oh, please don't be afraid. I merely want to talk."

"Who...are you?" Kaede asks tentatively. "You're Shinguji, right?"

"Yes, you can call me Shinguji," Shinguji says. "My dear brother isn't available right now. You've made him awfully upset. Everyone has. Why can't he have the Necronomicon, dear?"

"Dear brother?" Kaede blinks. "Are you...his sister?"

"Indeed, that is correct," Shinguji answers, closing his (her?) eyes. "I sensed my brother needed some help so I've decided to step in. Brother really likes you so he's confused why you don't want to help him."

"I'm...really not sure what's going on but do you understand the situation?" Kaede asks. "He wants the Necronomicon but it's a motive. We don't know what would happen if someone uses it so to keep the group safe--"

"But no one else wants to use it, correct?" Shinguji points out. "Come on, let him have it. Come on, come on. My dear brother is so desperate for it and so am I. I'd do anything to reunite with him--"

"Shinguji, if this is just some sort of prank then it's not funny," Kaede mumbles, hugging herself tightly. "I'm sorry that your sister is gone but--"

"Do you think I'm messing around?" Shinguji hisses before his mask is pulled up abruptly.

"Sister, you mustn't snap at her. She is correct in saying that the motive is dangerous."

"But you want to be with me, right? Right?"

"Of course, sister. But please have patience. Can't you see that you're scaring her?"

"Oh dear..." Shinguji licks his lips. "My apologies, that wasn't my intention. Korekiyo has been telling me how nice you are. He thinks that you're a wonderful friend. I shouldn't be so abrupt with someone who has been treating my brother well."

"Well..." Kaede swallows. "Shinguji hasn't given me a reason to hate him so..."

"He's wonderful, my Korekiyo," Shinguji says. "I miss him dearly. He's ever so kindly let me borrow his body for now but I want something more than this. I want to be alive again! Can't you

help me? You're the only one who can help me."

"I'm sorry but I can't," Kaede says. Her mouth feels dry. She takes another step back and her foot hits the shower room door. "M-Maybe I can look after the Necronomicon and give it to you later so-"

"Later isn't good enough," Shinguji says abruptly. "Don't be foolish. Apologise for suggesting such a stupid thing."

"You can't just come in here and start demanding things!" Kaede bites back. "Seriously, what's going on here? You're starting to really freak me out, you know?"

"And you're starting to get on my nerves," Shinguji fires back. "Tell me where the Necronomicon is, dear. That's all I'm asking. You don't want to keep me and my brother apart, right? Come on, tell me. Tell me."

Kaede grits her teeth. "That's it, I'm leaving. This isn't funny at all, Shinguji."

"Did I tell you that you could leave?"

Kaede gasps as Shinguji grabs her wrist tightly as she tries to pass him. It feels like her bone is about to shatter at any moment. Instantly, she tries to pull away but is unsuccessful.

"W-What are you doing? Let me go!"

"Tell me where the Necronomicon is then I will," Shinguji says, leaning forward. His face gets extremely close to Kaede's. "Come on, tell me. Tell me. Tell me."

"Y-You know I can't!" Kaede tugs on her arm desperately. "Seriously, Shinguji! What the hell do you think you're doing?! You're really hurting me!"

"Don't be such a baby," Shinguji sighs. "I'm starting to think my brother is wrong about you. If he sent you to me then I would've just ignored you."

"What does that even mean?!" Kaede sweats as she fails to free her arm. "Shinguji, please. I'm begging you! Just let me go!"

"Give me the Necronomicon."

"No!"

Kaede's eyes widen when her face is suddenly grabbed. Shinguji's bandaged hand squeezes her jaw and she tilts her head away, eyes watering in pain as he lowers his face until his nose is practically touching her own.

"Don't be silly you little girl." His fingernails dig into her skin. "Tell me where it is!"

"N-No!"

"Why do you insist on being such a hassle?" Shinguji's eyes go cold. "Tell. Me. Where. It. Is."

"I-I-"

"I won't ask again," Shinguji says. Kaede's face goes numb as he squeezes even tighter. "Or do I have to force its location out of you?!"

Kaede shakes her head furiously, feeling a speck of blood dribble down her cheek. She hadn't noticed how long his nails were. "W-Why are you-"

"Shut up and tell me-"

Crack!

Kaede gasps as Shinguji's grip on her softens and she runs a hand gingerly over her cheek, eyes going wide when she sees pink smearing her fingertips. She looks up at Shinguji, taking in deep breaths as he simply stands there before swaying. She sucks in a small breath when his eyes suddenly roll backwards and he tumbles onto the floor and lands on his back.

The pianist blinks at Korekiyo and it takes her a moment to notice that there's a bloody tennis ball by his head. She lifts her head up and sees Ryoma standing by the entrance with a tennis racket in one hand and another tennis ball in his other.

Neither of them say a word. Kaede stares at him with a shocked expression whilst Ryoma looks back at her calmly.

"...you okay, Akamatsu?"

"I..." Kaede swallows, slowly looking down at Korekiyo and then at Ryoma. "You..."

Ryoma has an unreadable expression on his face as he heads over to Korekiyo and puts his fingers on the anthropologist's wrist. There's a pause before Ryoma grimaces. "Shit..."

"Is he dead?" Kaede asks helplessly.

Ryoma hesitates before sighing, giving her a small nod. "Yeah..."

"Oh shit..." Kaede shuffles away from the body, desperately trying her best to not start gagging. She's not sure if Shinguji's threats have finally gotten to her or the fact that there's a small pool of blood growing under Korekiyo's head. "Hoshi..."

"I only meant to knock him out," Ryoma admits quietly, dropping his racket to the floor with a loud clatter. "Ah..."

"What do we..." Kaede runs a hand through her hair helplessly. "Oh God, what do we do, Hoshi?"

In the midst of her panic she realises that Ryoma isn't moving and that he's simply staring at Korekiyo with an unreadable expression on his face. The horrifying realization that she's going to have to figure out what to do next dawns on her. Of course the right thing to do is to find two more people to set the body discovery off but...

Kaede paces back and forth frantically, her hands cupping the back of her head as she desperately thinks of a solution to fix the problem. She knows if Korekiyo is seen then Monokuma is going to kill Ryoma but that's not fair. He was only protecting her! She can't let him die on her behalf. He just made a simple mistake! She needs to think of something and something fast before-

"Akamatsu, I saw you were in here and thought we could-"

Kaede makes a helpless noise as Tsumugi steps into the room, instantly coming to a halt when her eyes land on Korekiyo. The blue haired girl's mouth falls open and Kaede watches as Tsumugi blinks a couple of times.

“That’s...” Tsumugi clears her throat. “Who...who did this?”

Ryoma doesn’t answer and a strangled sound leaves Kaede’s mouth, her fingers digging tightly into her scalp. Tsumugi stares at them both incredulously before sighing softly. Kaede almost chokes when Tsumugi bends down and picks up Korekiyo under his armpits and starts to drag him towards the shower room.

“W-What are you doing?!” Kaede shrieks, jumping out of the way as Tsumugi gets closer to her.

“Hiding the body,” Tsumugi says and Kaede has no idea how Tsumugi is managing to keep a straight face. “Because if Shinguji is found then you’re going to get punished.”

“B-But it wasn’t me who...” Kaede squeezes her eyes shut and inhales heavily through her nose. “It was an accident, Shirogane. Shinguji was...hurting me and Hoshi walked in and...”

“So it was Hoshi who killed him?” Tsumugi pauses. “Ah...I guess I jumped to the wrong conclusion then...”

Kaede doesn’t know whether to be bewildered or not about the fact Tsumugi thought she was the one who killed Korekiyo or the fact that she was willing to *hide a body* for Kaede. The pianist trembles before saying, “Shirogane, I don’t know what to do! If one more person sees Shinguji then Hoshi...”

“You can’t just hide him.” Ryoma frowns, finally snapping out of the daze he was in. “That’s just going to cause even more trouble-”

“If one more person sees him then you’re going to die,” Kaede argues weakly, spinning around to face him. “And I won’t let that happen-”

“And I don’t want to cause trouble for you or anyone else,” Ryoma mutters. “I didn’t intend to kill the guy. I just wanted him to let you go.”

“So you hit him?!” Tsumugi asks in disbelief.

Kaede shakes her head. “I-It wasn’t like that! He had no choice-”

“Of course I had a choice,” Ryoma murmurs. “But instinct took over. I saw you being threatened and I did what I thought was right.”

“It was a split second decision!” Kaede counters. “It really was an accident!”

“Well Monokuma certainly isn’t going to see it that way,” Tsumugi very unhelpfully points out. “Still, if you want the body moving for now then I’ll just put it in the shower room. I doubt anyone is ever going to have a reason to go in there.”

“People are going to realise Shinguji is missing rather quickly,” Ryoma hisses. “And I’m not about to sit around and pretend everything is okay when I’ve messed up horribly again. Sorry for not saying anything earlier, Akamatsu, but hiding the body isn’t an option-”

“I’m not letting you die,” Kaede responds harshly. “*Especially* because of me-”

Ryoma sighs heavily and tugs on his hat. “It was my choice to save you, Akamatsu. Of course I didn’t mean for things to turn out like this but I’m not about to cause more problems for everyone when we can just cut to the chase.”

“I said I’m not letting you die,” Kaede grits out, feeling her fists curl by her sides. “Shirogane, we’re putting Shinguji in the shower room-”

“I’ll just tell everyone where he is and what happened,” Ryoma counters.

Kaede is startled by how exhausted he sounds. “B-But...”

“Are you that desperate to die?” Tsumugi suddenly asks. Her eyes have gone cold. “Akamatsu is willing to risk everything to keep you safe. Can’t you pretend to be a little bit grateful?”

“She shouldn’t have to deal with my mistakes,” Ryoma says. “And it’ll be incredibly disrespectful towards Shinguji and his family if we just toss him to the side just to save a criminal.”

“He was threatening Akamatsu, right?” Tsumugi crosses her arms, letting Korekiyo’s hands flop to the floor uselessly. “It doesn’t sound like he was a good person in the first place. We don’t have to care about how he feels anymore because he’s dead anyway.”

“S-Shirogane,” Kaede yelps. “You...you can’t say that!”

“What? It’s true,” Tsumugi says. “I couldn’t care less that you have a death wish, Hoshi. I just think you’re being incredibly selfish right now. You’re going to put everyone through watching you die just because you’re so desperate to?”

“That’s not it at all,” Ryoma says with a heavy frown. “Don’t go making assumptions about people you know nothing about.”

“Guys, can you just stop it!” Kaede chews on her bottom lip as she hesitantly gives Korekiyo’s body a quick glance. “Arguing isn’t going to get us anywhere! We just...we need to...”

“Akamatsu, stop it.” Ryoma shakes his head before sighing. “This really isn’t your problem so stop trying to make decisions for me. We’re not hiding the body and that’s final.”

“B-But...” Kaede feels her bottom lip tremble. “You know what’s going to happen if...”

“Let’s get you some fresh air,” Ryoma says as Kaede swallows down a thick lump in her throat.

He leads her out of the room and Kaede isn’t too surprised when Tsumugi follows after the two, giving Korekiyo a strange look. The pianist doesn’t know how to feel when they finally get outside. It feels like any other day but...

“Shirogane, can you look after her?” Ryoma suddenly asks. “I just...need a moment to myself before...”

“...yeah, I can do that.”

Tsumugi puts a hand on her shoulder before leading her towards the dormitories. Kaede feels weightless as the blue haired girl pauses, clearly wondering which room to take her to when her eyes suddenly light up.

“How about we see Amami?” Tsumugi suggests. “You’ve spent a lot of time with him lately, right? As much as I really do want to look after you, there’s something I need to do.”

“You’re not going to move...him, right?” Kaede asks anxiously. “Hoshi already said-”

“I just remembered that I left the door to his lab open,” Tsumugi admits. “If someone wanders up there and sees Shinguji then...you know?”

Kaede's eyes go wide. "You should hurry then-"

"Oh, I'm sure a couple of minutes won't hurt," Tsumugi says. "Besides, I'll wait with you until Amami answers his door."

"T-That's not-"

Tsumugi ignores her as she knocks on Rantaro's door promptly and takes a step back, giving Kaede a reassuring smile as the two wait. Kaede feels her stomach do flip flops as Rantaro opens the door. He notices Tsumugi first and scowls before quickly spotting Kaede. She thought that he'd be happy to see her but he suddenly looks furious.

"Amami? What's wro-"

"Who hurt you?"

"Oh..." Kaede almost forgot about the scratches on her face. She lightly touches them. "It really doesn't matter-"

"Of course it does," Rantaro argues and if looks could kill then Tsumugi would be dead as he turns to face her. "What the hell happened? *You* didn't do this, did you?"

"Hmm? Me?" Tsumugi asks. She turns away from staring at Rantaro's room to shake her head.

"No, I just found her like this."

"At least sound like you care," Rantaro grumbles. "Hey, Akamatsu? Who did this because this isn't okay-"

"It really isn't a big deal," Kaede murmurs, turning her head to the side. "They don't even hurt..."

"...please don't lie to me," Rantaro says quietly. "Someone hurt you and it's not your responsibility to protect them. Shirogane, are you sure you didn't see anything?"

"I'm sorry Amami but I didn't see anything," Tsumugi says. "I'm plainly in the dark as much as you are."

Rantaro narrows his eyes and Kaede can tell he knows something isn't adding up. She gently grabs his shoulder. "Hey, seriously. It's nothing for you to worry about. Everything is sorted now, okay?"

"That's not the point," Rantaro sighs. "At least let me clean the scratches for you."

Kaede rolls her eyes fondly. "They don't need cleaning-"

"Actually, I remember seeing some first aid kits in the warehouse when I checked it out a while ago," Tsumugi says, patting her skirt pockets for a moment before pulling out a key. "Here, use this to get into the warehouse. It's probably for the best if you do get those scratches cleaned, Akamatsu."

"But..."

"C'mon, it won't take that long," Rantaro insists, grabbing her hand and marching her towards the academy.

Kaede feels a wave of nausea hit her as they enter the building and is quiet as Rantaro unlocks the warehouse door. When the lock falls he pockets it and pulls her inside.

“Wow, there’s sure a lot of things in here,” Rantaro comments. “You stay here whilst I look around, okay? I don’t think it’ll take me too long to find a first aid kit.”

He leaves without another word and Kaede swallows, leaning against the wall heavily.

She feels like she’s in a nightmare within a nightmare. She can’t help but feel bitterly disappointed that Monokuma has won once again. She wonders if he’s satisfied, that he’s happy that he’s managed to cause so much pain and death in such a small amount of time.

Her eyes are strangely dry despite everything that has happened today. With Kokichi and Tenko she cried until she had no tears left. It makes her feel sick that she’s actually getting used to death. Better yet, she’s more upset for Ryoma than Korekiyo. What sort of person does that make her?

Kaede growls as she clenches and unclenches her fists. She hates feeling this helpless. She hates Ryoma for taking control from her. She hates him for accepting his fate. She hates Korekiyo for acting so strange this morning. She hates herself for being found by him. However, most of all, she hates Monokuma for simply existing. She can imagine him laughing at them all now as Ryoma is forced to die over an accident. She can see his smug face laughing and laughing and laughing.

Kaede shrieks as she throws a fist at the imaginary Monokuma and howls when her fist hits something hard. With a gasp she looks down at her trembling hand, spotting that her knuckles have become bloody.

“Holy shit, Akamatsu.”

Kaede cradles her hand to her chest as Rantaro approaches apprehensively with a small white box. He looks at her hand and then at the wall which has a smear of blood on it.

She’s expecting him to scold her but he instead wordlessly leads her towards the gym mats and gestures for her to sit down. She bites her lip as he goes through the white box and pulls out bandages and bottles full of liquid to clean up her wounds.

“If you don’t want to tell me what happened then that’s fine,” Rantaro suddenly says, dabbing her face carefully with a soaked piece of cotton. “But I’m really worried about you. Can you at least tell me why someone hurt you?”

“...I had an argument,” Kaede responds quietly. “But there’s nothing you can do about it now.”

“I...see,” Rantaro says slowly. “Did Shirogane sort it out?”

Kaede shakes her head. “She didn’t see what happened. It was...Hoshi who helped me.”

“Hoshi?” Rantaro carefully lifts up her throbbing hand. “Is he okay?”

“He’s...” Kaede winces when he cleans up her knuckles. “He’s...”

“...Akamatsu? Hoshi is okay, right?”

Kaede can’t look him in the eye as she fidgets nervously. She’s tempted to pull her hand away when the monitor in the warehouse suddenly springs to life. She spots Monokuma sitting on a chair looking very proud of himself.

“A body has been discovered!” Monokuma announces and Kaede pulls a face, curling up on herself as she holds her breath, waiting for him to continue. “Please can everyone gather at the dormitories!”

“The dormitories?” Kaede repeats breathlessly. “But...”

“We were literally just there,” Rantaro says. “I don’t understand. What could’ve happened in such a short amount of-”

Kaede tilts her head to the side as she notices Rantaro turn scarily pale. “Amami?”

“Akamatsu, I forgot to lock the door,” Rantaro says and drops the first aid kit on the floor as he quickly stands up. “We need to go now!”

Kaede forgets about her throbbing fist as she runs after Rantaro, both of them pushing past Tsumugi who is just at the school entrance. Kaede can’t tell if the girl had just arrived when the announcement went off but even Tsumugi looks startled as she spins around on her heel to leave the building.

Her heart is in her throat as Rantaro pushes the dormitory doors open. She instantly spots Gonta, Kaito, Ryoma and Angie standing outside of Rantaro’s room and she swears under her breath as she hesitantly gets closer to the small group.

Seeing Kiibo sprawled out on the floor in pieces doesn’t surprise her as much as it should. She looks away instantly, gritting her teeth. Five minutes. Rantaro and Kaede had left him alone for *five minutes*.

It’s a horrible reminder that the mastermind is always going to be one step ahead of everyone.

Kaede stares at the floor as Monokuma waits with the group. From the corner of her eye she can see his grin getting wider and wider as the group waits around, an ugly laugh tumbling out of his mouth when Gonta innocently asks, “um, where Shinguji at?”

Ryoma is punished.

There’s no class trial. There’s no justice for Kiibo. There’s no time to mourn.

Kaede isn’t sure if she’s more pissed off about the fact Ryoma gave up without a fight or the fact Monokuma made it obvious he was loving every moment of his confession.

“If it’s my time to go then it’s my time to go,” Ryoma had said after explaining himself. “I’m not giving Monokuma the satisfaction of squeezing a class trial out of this situation either. I’m sorry I let you all down.”

She had felt numb during his punishment, looking away as he was killed.

(The numb feeling had only continued after realising that there’s now only six of them left. How did everything go so wrong?)

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 4 Part 1

Chapter Notes

A shorter chapter this time but it's still very important! Kaede's loop is finally nearing its end!

Thank you for the comments! They mean a lot!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

“Does someone want to explain what the hell they’re playing at?”

To say Kaito is angry is an understatement. His face is practically the same colour as his hair and if he clenches his fists any tighter then his bones are going to pop through his skin. He looks like he’s dangerously close to hitting something, or worse, someone.

Kaede gingerly runs a finger over her bandaged hand with a wince. There’s a couple spots of blood that have soaked through already, staining her white bandage pink. She cradles her fist to her chest with shame.

The remaining six of them are in the dining room whilst Monokuma is upstairs destroying yet another floor of the school. Everyone can hear him drilling loudly into the floors and walls. It’s a miracle that the entire building hasn’t collapsed on itself yet. Kaede sneaks a glance up at the ceiling, biting her lip when she spots small clouds of dust appearing.

She jumps when Kaito slams his fist onto the table. “Someone fucking killed Kiibo. Who was it?!”

“M-Maybe it was accident?” Gonta hesitantly suggests. “Gonta not know what happened. Gonta just leave room to get breakfast and heard announcement play! He saw everyone else outside of Amami’s room!”

Rantaro shuffles in his chair uncomfortably as everyone turns to look at him. “I only left him alone for five minutes. I don’t understand how...”

“What was Kiibo doing in your room anyway?” Tsumugi asks. “He stayed there overnight, right? Akamatsu too.”

“My room doesn’t have a door so Amami let me stay in his,” Kaede says. “And Kiibo joined us because...”

“Does that mean you’re one of the last people to see Kiibo alive?” Kaito asks before frowning. “He was fine during the night, right?”

“Of course he was!” Kaede’s eyes go wide as a sudden realisation hits her. “Wait, you don’t think I did this, do you?”

“No, not you,” Tsumugi says as she leans forward with narrowed eyes. “But Amami was in his room too, right? And it was his room where Kiibo was broken-”

“Are you seriously accusing me of breaking Kiibo?” Rantaro asks incredulously. “Why would I do that? I’ve been with him every single day-”

“The two of you hung around together a lot recently,” Tsumugi points out. “Why? Were you trying to figure out what his weak points were or something? I didn’t think the two of you were friends.”

“That’s...” Rantaro runs a hand down his face. “We were friends, *actually*. He trusted me to keep him safe because...because he had some mysterious audio saved on his tape. He had this audio recording function that records everything at all times and found out he had hundred of hours worth of stuff recorded so we’d been listening to it together for the last couple of days-”

“How do we know you’re not lying?” Tsumugi asks. “Is this just a cover story or-”

“No, he’s not lying,” Kaede says, putting a hand to her chest. “I was the one who brought Kiibo to Amami because I was there when Kiibo figured out he had so much audio saved.”

“G-Gonta there too but he was told not to say anything...” Gonta admits nervously. “Gonta no want to get anyone into trouble though!”

“Kaede? You’ve been hiding something from the group?” Kaito raises an eyebrow. “Why? I thought you knew you could trust everyone!”

“Not...Not everyone,” Kaede says slowly, giving Rantaro an uncertain look.

Rantaro sighs as he crosses his arms. “Momota, we’re in a killing game. It’s not wise to always share everything you know. I understand that you want to believe in everyone but sometimes the right thing to do is-”

“What? Doubt my allies?” Kaito fires back. “If you knew that Kiibo was going to be in danger because of...because of whatever audio thing he had then why didn’t you say something?”

“I thought I could keep him safe,” Rantaro murmurs, fidgeting with several rings on his fingers.

“From what?” Kaito crosses his arms. “Monokuma? What was so important about his audio?”

“I think there might be a chance that...” Kaede takes a deep breath. “No, I’m certain we’ve all been here before and there’s a lot of evidence to prove it. Well, Kiibo had a lot of convincing evidence saved in his audio but now...”

“So we definitely been here before?” Gonta blinks. “Strange, Gonta no remember this place at all and Gonta has good memory. Well, Gonta thinks he has good memory...”

“I think Monokuma has something that can make us forget certain things,” Kaede continues. “The other day he asked Shinguji and I if we found any flashlights and I heard something on the audio about the flashlights being able to restore memories. I’m confident that we’ve been here before and something must’ve happened to cause Monokuma to make us forget our previous time here so-”

Tsumugi clears her throat loudly. “Are you sure about all of this, Akamatsu? All of this sounds...like something straight out of a sci-fi novel.”

“Gonta really confused too,” Gonta admits as he rubs his chin. “Can flashlights really change memories? Gonta thought they only create light! Gonta also not seen any here either...”

“I think they might’ve been moved somewhere or something,” Kaede says, internally wincing at her weak excuse. “But I know without a doubt that we’ve been here before and we were made to

forget any other previous times we've been here."

Kaito gives her a strange look. "But what's that got to do with Kiibo being destroyed? Do you think Monokuma figured out that Kiibo might've had something important recorded and didn't want us to hear it?"

"Perhaps," Kaede says. "But..."

"I doubt Monokuma would've had the strength to completely dismantle Kiibo so quickly," Rantaro says. "He was fine when I left him. I was only gone for five minutes when-"

"...that's not right," Tsumugi says quietly. "Because he was broken when I saw him after you left your room."

Kaede's surprised Rantaro doesn't break his neck as snaps his head to stare at Tsumugi.

"What did you just say?" Rantaro asks quietly. He doesn't sound confused. He sounds angry.

Tsumugi adjusts her glasses before saying, "you left your bedroom door open when you left to help Akamatsu. I saw Kiibo on the floor in pieces and I left to go to the school to stop you from also hurting Akamatsu-"

"Bullshit!" Rantaro's chair clatters heavily onto the floor as he stands up, jabbing a furious finger in Tsumugi's direction. "He was completely fine when I left him! If what you're saying is true then you're the only person who could've killed him!"

"Gonta thinks you both need to calm down!" Gonta cries, frantically waving his hands up and down. "There must be something that explains-"

"What reason do I have to lie?" Tsumugi fires back, her palms slapping the table as she also pulls herself up from sitting. "I saw what I saw! You've been pretending to be a part of the group the entire time you've been here but you're actually someone who *enjoys* this game, aren't you?"

"Does it *look* like I'm enjoying this game?" Rantaro snaps. His face turns dark. "I've been trying since day one to stop this game. I *despise* this game more than anyone in this room. Why the hell would I sabotage myself by killing Kiibo? I've been pushing myself to the point of exhaustion for days now just to-"

"Maybe you secretly wanted to fail?" Tsumugi suggests. "I don't know what's going on in that *sick* head of yours-"

"Sick?!"

"Alright you two, that's enough." Kaito's gruff voice abruptly stops the argument. "I don't know what the hell is going on but screaming at each other isn't going to help. Amami, Maki, sit back down."

Rantaro looks irritated as he takes his seat, refusing to look at Tsumugi as she gives the green haired man a blank look. Kaede uncomfortably shuffles in her seat, sweat lining the palm of her hands.

"Gonta no understand. Shirogane says Amami killed Kiibo but Amami insists he didn't," Gonta says. "But if Shirogane thinks Amami killed Kiibo then who does Amami think did?"

"I wasn't sure at first but now I'm certain I know," Rantaro responds with an angry look in his

eyes. "Someone as guilty as Shirogane would only make up such a convoluted story-"

"Me? Convoluted?" Tsumugi rolls her eyes. "You're the one who has been plainly suspicious the last couple of days. All you've been doing is hiding in your room and making Akamatsu bring you meals-"

"I've been listening to the audio the last couple of days," Rantaro responds. "I've not had the time to get my own meals and I wanted to keep Kiibo safe-"

"Oh, a likely story!"

"Actually, he is telling the truth," Kaede says softly. "Shirogane, he's not lying about wanting to keep Kiibo safe. I've spent enough time around him to know that he's not a bad person and I'm confident he's not the person who hurt Kiibo."

"He could just be putting on an act," Tsumugi tells her, shifting in her seat so that she's facing the pianist. "Some people will do anything to live, Akamatsu. Some people are very good at adapting and will do anything to survive."

"To survive..." Kaede licks her lips.

"If you're that desperate to know then I'm the Ultimate Survivor."

Rantaro looks suddenly panicked as Kaede goes quiet. "Akamatsu...you don't actually believe her, do you? You know that it's impossible for me to be Kiibo's killer. When you woke up he was alive, right?"

"Yeah..." Kaede remembers seeing Kiibo on charge. "Yeah, he was."

"But you left to exercise, right?" Tsumugi adds as she tilts her head to the side. "I saw you upstairs. You must've been upstairs for a while because of what happened with Hoshi and Shinguji. That would've given Amami plenty of time to kill Kiibo-"

"Kiibo was alive when Akamatsu left," Rantaro says firmly. "And he was alive when you brought her to my room. I'm not sure whether there's a rule about double murders and who gets punished in this situation but Monokuma seemed happy enough to just punish Hoshi. The only explanation I can think of is that he also wanted Kiibo out of the way and worked together with one of us to get rid of him."

"Hold up! What the hell are you saying?!" Kaito slams a fist onto the table. "You seriously don't think any of us would stoop down to Monokuma's level, right?! That's insane!"

"But it's what happened," Rantaro says. "Why else did Kiibo end up dead? I don't think anyone here would've killed someone like him without a reason. Kiibo was nothing but nice to all of us."

"Then maybe you're right about there being someone who is working with Monokuma," Tsumugi suddenly says. "And the only person who that can be is you, right?"

"If it's anyone here then it's you," Rantaro argues, his voice going dangerously quiet. "I have an alibi for when Kiibo died. I was with Akamatsu and you know this."

"Well I don't remember Akamatsu saying she saw Kiibo when I brought her to you after she was attacked by Shinguji," Tsumugi says. "She said she saw him when she woke up but that's the last time she saw him, right, Akamatsu?"

Kaede swallows heavily, a sickly feeling churning in her stomach. She gives Rantaro an uncertain look as she nods. "That's...right. But--"

"And I'm certainly not lying..." Tsumugi's icy blue eyes snap towards Rantaro. "So that leaves only Amami to be the only person capable of killing Kiibo without getting caught, meaning he's also probably the person who is working with Monokuma."

"You..." Rantaro's face goes from angry to furious to...blank. "...there's no winning against you, is there?"

"I plainly don't know what you're on about," Tsumugi says calmly. "But I don't know why you're so desperate to pin me as Kiibo's killer. Is it because I'm an assassin, is that it?"

"Like hell you're an assassin," Rantaro says, twisting a ring around his finger so hard that it makes his finger turn red. "You're just using the real Maki Harukawa as a scapegoat, aren't you? You're just using someone who isn't even here to save your own skin."

"Hey! Leave Maki alone," Kaito snaps, leaning forward with a frown on his face. "She's only trying to help!"

"She's tricking everyone, not helping," Rantaro hisses. "And I have proof that--"

"Go on then, show us this proof," Tsumugi says and she doesn't even look the slightest bit scared. "Prove to me how I'm working with Monokuma. You know, the same bear who forced me to expose my real identity. God, you really are desperate, aren't you? You can't take responsibility for your own actions."

"I didn't do anything wrong," Rantaro scowls as he pulls his Monopad from his pocket. "And I have actual proof unlike you."

"Gonta really do think this is getting out of hand," Gonta helplessly says. Next to him, Angie shuffles closer to the large entomologist. "Friends should not argue! We have lost too many friends to start arguing with each other now! So Gonta begs you both to stop!"

"I'm not the one who killed one of our friends and got away with it," Tsumugi says. "And I've not been hiding anything from any of you ever since telling you all about my talent. Amami is only hellbent that I'm Kiibo's killer because that's all he sees me as. A killer--"

"There's a mastermind here," Rantaro abruptly says, turning on his Monopad and passing it over to Kaito. He gives Kaede an anxious look before taking a deep breath. "I woke up with a strange message on my tablet warning me about a mastermind. There's someone here working with Monokuma to make sure that the killing game is running smoothly."

"You've...known something like this the entire time and didn't tell anyone?" Kaito asks with a confused expression, scratching his head as he reads through the tablet.

Kaede shakes her head. "No, he told me."

"And Ouma," Rantaro says. "Ouma was with both Akamatsu and I when we were discussing the idea of there being a traitor."

"What's Ouma got to do with any of this? He's dead," Kaito says as he passes the Monopad over to Gonta. "And why did you tell him before me?! He died ages ago! Does this mean you've been hiding stuff from the very start of the game?"

“Believe me, I had a good reason to,” Rantaro says. “As selfish as this sounds, I really don’t want to die. If I started to flaunt my tablet around then the mastermind would’ve killed me. However, there’s only six of us left now and I can’t afford to hesitate anymore.”

Tsumugi pulls a face as Gonta passes the tablet to Angie. “This sounds a little convenient though. How come your tablet is the only one that has a message on it?”

“I *don’t* know, okay?” Rantaro sighs. “But you do, don’t you? Because you’re the mastermind.”

“No I’m not. I’m Maki Harukawa,” Tsumugi says before clearing her throat, nervously rubbing her arm as she does so. “And I’m the Ultimate Assassin. You’re just a suspicious guy who claims that he doesn’t even know his talent. What, are you going to blame that on me too?”

Rantaro narrows his eyes. “You know what? Yes I am. I don’t understand my talent actually and I bet this killing game is the reason why.”

“Wait? Amami actually know his talent?” Gonta frowns. “Why he lie to us then?”

“Because his talent is confusing,” Kaede says.

Kaito’s eyes go wide. “Wait, he told you about his talent too but not anyone else?!”

“Because I trust Akamatsu,” Rantaro says firmly. “And with what happened this morning I know it’s impossible for her to be the mastermind because she has a definite alibi for Kiibo’s murder.”

“Yeah, she was with Hoshi and I whilst you were killing Kiibo,” Tsumugi says darkly. “I know a manipulator when I see one. You’ve just been pretending to be Akamatsu’s friend all this time, haven’t you? Why? To use her as a scapegoat later on?”

Kaede doesn’t understand what’s going on. The pianist frowns as she says, “Shirogane, what are you on about? That can’t be true because-”

“This is getting nowhere!” Kaito pulls a face as he leans back into his chair, cold sweat trickling down his face as he closes his eyes. “Maybe you’re both wrong. Maki is my sidekick and I believe in her. However, I know Kaede trusts Amami and so if she trusts him then....”

“Is that true, Akamatsu?” Tsumugi asks. “Do you really trust Amami? I’m...really not lying about Kiibo. When you left with Amami he was broken on the floor so I went to find you. You remember seeing me in the school, right?”

“...at the entrance,” Kaede says quietly. “Amami and I ran past you...”

Kaito sits up a little straighter with a frown. “...is this some joke or something?”

“Huh?” Kaede blinks.

“If both of my sidekicks are certain of what they saw and know then...” Kaito’s nostrils flare as he gives Rantaro a dirty look. “Do you want to fucking explain yourself?”

“Me?” Rantaro pales.

“Momota, I never said I thought Amami-”

“Akamatsu, you don’t have to make excuses for him,” Tsumugi says carefully. “He’s been manipulating you the entire time and I know that’s not something you want to hear but I won’t let him confuse you anymore.”

"I haven't been..." Rantaro stops playing with his rings, his hands falling uselessly towards the floor. "...ahaha."

"What's so funny?" Tsumugi snaps.

Rantaro runs both of his hands through his hair helplessly. "I knew it. From the very start I knew if I tried to turn to people for help then..."

"Gonta want to help..." Gonta says quietly. "But Gonta not sure what wrong with Amami. He's looking very...scary."

"C'mon, man," Kaito sighs heavily. "We've been through enough already. Can't you just stop all of this?"

"I'd love to stop all of this," Rantaro admits softly. "But I can't because you're asking the wrong person. However, it's obvious I'm just wasting my time here so if you'll all excuse me."

"Where do you think you're going?" Tsumugi asks, springing from her chair. "You can't just walk away from this! You're going to take responsibility for Kiibo's death! You can't just kill him and get away with it!"

"I'll only take responsibility for letting him die in the first place," Rantaro murmurs. "If I had locked the door then..."

"Gonta...Gonta really think Amami feels really bad about Kiibo," Gonta says. "Maybe we shouldn't be too hard on him. No one knows what really happen so-"

"Gonta, only Amami can be Kiibo's killer," Tsumugi explains gently. "He's the only person who would've had enough time to-"

"Angie disagrees."

Tsumugi snaps her head over in Angie's direction. "Sorry? I don't think any of us heard you properly."

Angie lowers her head to her chest, her fringe and pigtails hiding her face.

Kaede bites her lip. What did Angie just say? She had practically whispered what she said. "Angie?"

"...Angie said she still has Amami's tablet," Angie says as she holds out a tablet for Rantaro to grab.

"Ah..." Rantaro hesitantly takes the tablet from Angie's hand. "Thank you."

Tsumugi narrows her eyes. "Don't think I'm letting you walk away so easily. How *dare* you kill Kiibo and sabotage the rest of us. Kiibo had important information saved, right? What if he had a way out of here in his audio?"

"Well we'll never know now, will we?" Rantaro gives her a hard look before walking away.

"I'm not done talking to you!" Tsumugi calls after him, storming across the room quickly. "How dare you act like the victim in all of this! You're the one who put us into this hell! I finally get the chance to make more friends and you're forcing me to watch them all die!"

"Then stop the game," Rantaro says with a voice void of emotion.

Tsumugi stares at him. "I can't because I'm not the one working with Monokuma! You are!"

"Shirogane..." Kaede grimaces as she pulls herself up from her chair and carefully places a hand on Tsumugi's elbow, pulling her back. "Please stop it. I really think that...maybe you're mistaken."

"Huh?" Tsumugi blinks at her with surprise. "But I know what I saw-"

"A lot of things have happened this morning," Kaede says, gritting her teeth. "But Amami is my friend and..."

"I'm your friend too," Tsumugi says and Kaede can hear a hint of anxiety in her voice. "I only want to protect you."

"Gonta think this must be trap!" Gonta says as he clenches a fist sadly. "A trap from Monokuma! H-He must've killed Kiibo and wants us to all argue!"

"The rules say Monokuma can't be directly involved with a murder," Tsumugi points out.

"But we don't know if rules actually matter once there has been murder!" Gonta frantically argues. "Gonta want to believe that only Monokuma is only bad guy here! Gonta no want to believe that one of his friends is making him go through such a horrible thing!"

"Gonta..." Rantaro looks away.

"...if Monokuma is responsible for Kiibo's death then that means both of my sidekicks are right," Kaito says slowly. "And I believe in them both."

"Gonta no want to argue with his friends anymore!" Gonta cries. He looks like he's dangerously close to tears. "Gonta want to live with friends and leave this place with everyone! Maybe Amami been tricked from the start! A-And Shirogane is mistaken!"

"If only that was true," Tsumugi says sadly and curls her hands around Kaede's upper arm, hugging it tightly. "But it's plain to see that someone in this room killed Kiibo and they just don't want to admit it."

Rantaro sighs heavily. "Why do you care so much anyway? You're an assassin. You should be used to dealing with death, right?"

"Just because I'm used to it doesn't mean I enjoy people dying," Tsumugi snaps. "You don't understand what I've been through and what I've had to do to survive. I bet someone like you has lived an easy life up until now."

"Is that what you think?" Rantaro responds with a raised eyebrow. "Well anyway, since you're so hellbent on me being Kiibo's killer and Monokuma's partner in crime then I guess I'll just leave. I'm wasting time arguing with you."

"What? Are you gonna leave and think of a new way to get away with murder?" Tsumugi sneers. "Good luck with that. Everyone is going to be really wary of you from now since they know you're the mastermind."

"But Gonta not think Amami is mastermind," Gonta says. "Gonta no think there is mastermind at all. He thinks Amami's tablet is just a trick to scare him!"

"I just wish you said something earlier man," Kaito sighs, giving Rantaro a tired look. "Let's skip

all the bullshit, okay? If you say you're not the mastermind then I'll believe you-

"But why would you do that?!" Tsumugi let's go of Kaede's arm. "You have no reason to believe in him!"

"I have no choice but to believe in him," Kaito says. "And you. And everyone else here. Listen Maki, I get you're just trying to protect the group but something as serious as this is going to fucking tear us apart if we let it and I'm not about to take that risk."

"I thought I told you to stop calling me that," Tsumugi grumbles. "And what sort of logic is that? You're going to die if you trust the wrong person, you know? I'm only one person too! I can't protect you if I'm too busy protecting Akamatsu."

"Hey, Kaede is capable of looking after herself," Kaito says, giving Kaede a thumbs up. "And you don't need to worry about me, okay? What's important is that we stick together as a group and promise to not fucking kill each other for real this time."

"Gonta can easy promise that!" Gonta pumps both of his fists. "No way Gonta kill anyone! Gonta only protect and help everyone find exit! Gonta promise!"

"I'm not about to let anyone else here die either," Kaede says. "From what we know, three people managed to beat the game the last time we were here which means there has to be a way to beat Monokuma and his rules."

"But if you're promising to keep everyone alive does that also mean the mastermind?" Tsumugi asks. "I don't think I'm comfortable with letting the person who's responsible for all this live."

"Don't say things like that, Maki," Kaito says. "None of us here has to stoop down to Monokuma's level to leave. If Kaede is confident that there's a way for us to leave then there has to be."

"There's got to be a way to stop the killing game," Rantaro says softly. "Or a way to keep us all safe until we do manage to find an exit."

Tsumugi's face turns sour. "If there's an exit then we would've found it by now."

"Actually, I think I know a way to keep us all safe," Kaede suddenly says. "There's one last thing I've been hiding from you all."

"Another thing?" Kaito sighs. "Geez..."

"I-It's nothing personal!" Kaede insists. "But...unfortunately what I found is solid evidence that there really is a mastermind. There's a hidden room with two ways to get inside. One entrance is in the library and one is in the girl's bathroom, although the library entrance is impossible to go through since the door is locked."

"Other is in...girl's bathroom?" Gonta pauses. "Then Gonta no able to get to this secret room!"

"I think at this point the last thing any of us girls care about is who goes into the girl's bathroom," Kaede says. "The truth is, well, do you all remember how I found Ouma in the girl's bathroom when he was dying?"

"Yeah, I remember," Kaito responds. "It was never clear how he ended up there in the first place."

"Someone put him in there on purpose," Kaede says and takes a deep breath. "The mastermind did. There's a secret door in the girl's bathroom that is camouflaged to blend in with the wall. I was in

the bathroom when I saw the wall open up and that's when I saw Ouma."

"Wait, Ouma know about secret entrance?" Gonta blinks.

Kaede shakes her head. "The only entrance he knew about was the one in the library, although I do remember him suggesting there might be a second entrance and he was right. However, due to certain circumstances I'm going to presume he didn't actually find the secret entrance and instead only knew about it because the mastermind took him to it to hide him."

"Hide him?!" Kaito clears his throat. "Wait, are you saying someone found him after he'd been poisoned and just fucking hid him instead of helping him?"

"Yeah, that's right," Kaede says solemnly. She clutches her arm. "I...figured this out a while back and at first I didn't want to believe it. However, it's the only explanation that makes sense. Ouma wouldn't have had any reason to hide himself. When he died he had looked so scared..."

Rantaro sighs softly. "And you were the one who found him."

"I know Iruma is Ouma's actual killer since Monokuma let her leave," Kaede says. "But what pisses me off is that the mastermind made it impossible for Ouma to even have a small chance of living. So yeah, there's definitely a mastermind and the secret room is their own personal room or something."

"Has Akamatsu been in room?" Gonta asks.

Kaede nods. "Yeah, I checked it out. I should've told everyone from the start about the room but it's like Amami said, there's just some things you can't talk about without causing even more problems. But to get back on track, inside the room is a Monokuma making machine called Motherkuma. I don't think we can break her but if we guard her and get rid of Monokuma then..."

"We won't have to worry about Monokuma at least," Kaito realises slowly. "But what about the mastermind? Are you certain there really is one?"

"...yeah," Kaede answers, clenching her trembling fists. "And I'm not going to let them control us anymore. As far as I'm concerned, their stupid game is over."

"But if you're so certain that there is a mastermind then who do you think it is?" Tsumugi asks. "If the game is over then you should tell me who they are and I'll sort them out so no one else has to."

"Fucking hell, Maki," Kaito groans, running a hand down his face. "Don't say shit like that, okay?! Monokuma wins every time someone dies here. Even if we do destroy him then killing his partner in crime is just going to be another victory for him."

"You're naïve if you think we can beat this game peacefully," Tsumugi responds, her shoulders tensing up. "There's no way to stop this game until we eliminate all the threats and I've decided that it's my mission to keep everyone I care about safe."

"It shouldn't be your responsibility to keep everyone safe," Kaito says warily. "You're my sidekick so it's up to me to keep you safe! And that goes for everyone else too! I've been completely useless these last couple of days and that's my bad. However, now that I'm better again I'm going to help fix everything!"

"Gonta help too!" Gonta adds with a smile. "Gonta not smart so he really not understand what's going on but all he knows is that everyone want Monokuma defeated so we can all be safe! There six of us and only one of him so beating him should be easy!"

“And if we don’t have to worry about the mastermind making more Monokumas then we should be safe for a while,” Rantaro says. “At least, I hope we’ll all be safe.”

“...I don’t like this plan,” Tsumugi says slowly. “Akamatsu, you plan to have people guard the machine, right? But what if the mastermind ends up guarding it and just makes more Monokumas?”

“We’ll guard in pairs,” Kaede says.

“No offence but most of us aren’t really helpful at the moment,” Tsumugi points out. “You’re hurt, Momota is sick, Angie isn’t that strong and Amami is...really suspicious. Only Gonta and I are the perfect candidates.”

“No, only Gonta is the best person to guard,” Rantaro corrects her. “You’re suspicious too, Shirogane. Or should I say Harukawa?”

Tsumugi scowls deeply, scratching her arm once more. “Do you want to die?”

The question causes the entire room to freeze instantaneously. For the first time, Kaede realises that she’s actually truly afraid of Tsumugi as her expression darkens, her blue eyes glowing in a predatory way. She has no idea how Rantaro doesn’t even flinch. He simply looks her up and down before clearing his throat.

“You’re going to scare people saying stupid things like that,” Rantaro answers calmly.

“M-Maki, you can’t ask that!” Kaito frets. “Why would you even ask him something like that?”

Tsumugi holds her glare for a couple more seconds before looking away. “...old habits die hard.”

“Shirogane looked really, really scary,” Gonta says nervously. “Um...but Shirogane shouldn’t ask questions like that because no one here wants to die.”

“I don’t care what *Harukawa* says,” Rantaro says before turning to Kaede. “Akamatsu, I know you’re smart enough to figure out what’s going on here. Your plan will be even more effective if we apprehend both Motherkuma and the mastermind right now.”

“Don’t make it out that you’re the good guy,” Tsumugi snaps. “I know a threat when I see one.”

“Maki, seriously just cut it out,” Kaito sighs, putting a hand to his head. “You’ll die if you kill someone, remember?”

“Not if I’m killing the person responsible for the killing game,” Tsumugi says, her hands twitching by her sides. “And once I kill that person I’ll also dispose of Monokuma. I already have so much blood on my hands that killing one more person won’t make a difference-”

“It’ll make a difference to me!” Kaito shouts. “Have the last couple of days meant nothing to you? Turning to murder is what a coward would do!”

“Are you calling me a coward?” Tsumugi asks incredulously.

“I’ve only spent a couple days with you and I know that deep down you hate murder, don’t you?” Kaito says, narrowing his eyes. “What happened to the girl who has been looking after me? You seriously can’t expect me to believe that the same girl who has been forcing me to stay in bed because she’s worried about me pushing myself wants to turn murder to solve everything, right?”

“She just wants another murder to occur because that’ll mean the game will continue,” Rantaro points out. “Momota, I understand that you have no reason to trust me but I can promise you I can prove that I’m not the bad guy.”

Tsumugi scoffs. “You really are pathetic, aren’t you?”

“That’s *enough!*” Kaede yells, surprising even herself with how loud she is. “Will you both please just...cut it out already?! Passing the blame back and forth is something what kids would do and we’re in a...a *fucking* killing game!”

“I’m just trying to-”

“I don’t care what you’re trying to do!” Kaede throws her hands up in the air. “But screaming at each other isn’t going to get us anywhere! Someone in this room is lying and as much as I would love to figure out who that is, I don’t think I can right now! It pisses me off knowing that someone is probably laughing at us all on the inside right now. Look at us all! *Three people* have just died and we’re already down each other’s throats! Just...”

“D-Don’t cry, Akamatsu!” Gonta panics, reaching across the table to grab a napkin to pass to her. “Gonta really don’t like it when friends argue either so Gonta promises he won’t argue if that’ll make you happy again!”

“I’m not...” Kaede rubs her eyes with the sleeves of her shirt furiously. “Crying because I’m sad. I’m crying because I’m frustrated! Every time something like this happens, Monokuma and the mastermind win!”

“They haven’t won yet,” Kaito reassures her. “They’ll only win if we let them. If we’re still alive then that means we’re winning, not Monokuma or the mastermind.”

“But we’ve lost so many people! I keep telling myself that there’s going to be no more death and yet someone always dies!”

“So we’ll go along with your plan and stop the killing game from continuing for now,” Kaito says. “We’ll find a way to break that stupid Monokuma making machine you mentioned and refuse to play.”

“But what about mastermind?” Gonta asks. “They might stop us if we break machine!”

“And? I don’t fucking care about what they want,” Kaito says. “You’ll help me, right, Gonta?”

“Momota want Gonta to help?” Gonta blinks. “With breaking Monokuma machine?”

“I’ve already said that breaking the machine is going to be next to impossible and I’m not letting either of you get hurt,” Kaede says firmly. “For now, guarding it is the best thing to do until...”

“This game is only going to stop until all threats are eliminated or there’s two people left,” Tsumugi points out quietly. “Akamatsu, your plan is only going to work for a couple days at best. Someone is going to mess up or the wrong pair is going to be put together to guard the doors and when that happens-”

“Only Gonta, Momota and myself are going to guard the doors,” Kaede reveals strictly. “They’re the only two I can completely trust right now and are the strongest people to guard the entrance to the hidden room.”

Tsumugi looks taken aback. “You don’t trust me, Akamatsu? I’m the perfect person to guard the

door and you know it!”

“Your talent is useful, that is true,” Kaede says. “But with what happened just now, I don’t think you or Amami guarding the entrance is a very good idea. If both of you are so certain that one of you is the mastermind then...”

“But I’m not...” Tsumugi breathes heavily through her nose. “You’re making a huge mistake.”

“I don’t like being doubted but she’s making a smart decision actually,” Rantaro says, crossing his arms. “If you don’t want us guarding the entrance then where do you want us then, Akamatsu?”

Kaede is grateful that at least Rantaro is willing to comply with her. “Separate rooms at least. To keep you both safe.”

“Akamatsu, you know I’m not dangerous,” Tsumugi says. “Why are you doing this?”

“Shirogane, you literally just threatened Amami,” Kaede responds. “I don’t know what’s going on with you but I don’t like it at all. I desperately want to prove Monokuma wrong and show him that we can work together as a group to beat him but I can’t do that if you’re not willing to work with everyone.”

“But I am willing,” Tsumugi says. “I’m just not willing to work with *him*.”

Rantaro rolls his eyes as Tsumugi jabs a finger at him. “Guess we’re on the same wavelength then.”

“But what Angie do?” Gonta suddenly asks. “You forgot to give her a job.”

“I...” Kaede swallows. “Angie isn’t strong enough to defend herself if something happens. It’s probably safer if she-”

“Gonta will protect Angie!” Gonta suggests eagerly. “Because Gonta and Angie are friends! Angie can stay with Gonta and he guard her and door!”

“...yeah, I think that’ll work,” Kaede says. “Gonta, are you okay to take the first shift then? I’ll swap with you at lunch time.”

Gonta nods furiously. “Yes! Gonta thinks this is an excellent idea! Come on, Angie! Gonta keep you and door super safe!”

Angie looks surprised as Gonta all but drags her out of the room by the hand. “B-But we don’t actually know where the door is!”

“It in girl’s bathroom!” Gonta responds, pausing momentarily. Kaede smiles softly at him and nods. “Yes! Girl’s bathroom! So Gonta just need to guard inside that room until someone swaps with him! Gonta fully understands plan!”

Kaede feels slightly relieved when Gonta charges out of the dining room with Angie. Her smile however drops from her face as soon as they’re both gone. She crosses her arms with a sigh.

“Akamatsu...you seriously don’t think I’m the mastermind, do you?” Tsumugi asks quietly, wringing her hands together by her waist. “I thought we were finally friends again. I don’t understand why...you’re giving up on me so quickly.”

“Don’t make this any harder than it already is,” Kaede murmurs, turning her head to the side. “I am

absolutely desperate for all of this to be wrong and for there not to be a mastermind but...that's just wishful thinking. All I've wanted to do since waking up here is to protect everyone and I thought I would be able to do *anything* to keep you all safe. Take a look around, Shirogane. There's six of us left and there were thirteen of us originally. I can't afford to pretend everyone is my friend anymore."

"But are you really sure about one of us..." Kaito pauses. "One of them being the mastermind, Kaede? I'll believe in you no matter what happens but...something like this is serious."

"Momota, if the smallest part of me thought I was wrong then I wouldn't be having this conversation," Kaede says. "But enough is enough. I've been letting Monokuma and the mastermind get away with too much for too long. Sitting around and hoping for some answers to miraculously appear was never going to work in the first place. No one else should have to sacrifice themselves anymore just so we can live."

"How are you going to figure out which one of us is really the mastermind then?" Rantaro asks patiently. "Akamatsu, I'm not trying to appeal to you but I want you to think very hard. There's lots of evidence that'll help you come to a decision if you look hard enough."

"Don't sound so confident," Tsumugi says. "Sometimes looking for evidence is a waste of time. Sometimes it's better to trust your gut feeling-"

"Quite frankly, Shirogane, my gut feeling is telling me that you're acting really strange at the moment," Kaede says. "So please stop talking before you give me any more reason to suspect you."

Tsumugi opens and closes her mouth before letting out a dejected sigh. "Sorry..."

"Hey, are you really sure about Maki being the mastermind?" Kaito mumbles. "I believe in her, Kaede. I really do believe in Maki with everything that I've got."

"But can you say the same about Tsumugi Shirogane?" Rantaro mutters, holding his hands up when Kaede shoots him a half-hearted glare. "Sorry, keeping quiet now."

"The most logical thing to do is to separate you both and figure out what to do from there," Kaede says. "And...maybe it's probably for the best if someone stays with you both too. Just in case..."

"Then I'll stay with Maki," Kaito says. "I'm going to believe in her until the very end."

"...thank you," Tsumugi whispers softly.

"Then it looks like we're going to be stuck together for a while," Kaede says, giving Rantaro a look. "But before you both go I want you both to hand over your Monopads."

"Huh? But why?" Tsumugi blinks.

"Because you can see where everyone is on them," Kaede says. "This is to keep you both safe. I'm going to put your tablets somewhere safe where only I can access them so they don't get damaged, okay?"

Rantaro seems reluctant to hand it over but eventually presses his tablet into Kaede's hands. "Please keep it safe."

"I've already promised that I will," Kaede says, giving Tsumugi an expectant look.

Tsumugi silently passes her tablet over and watches as Kaede puts them both into her backpack. “If our tablets somehow break then we’ll get punished, you do remember that, right?”

“They’re going to be fine, trust me,” Kaede says before grabbing the straps of her backpack. “Momota, are you okay to take Shirogane somewhere and keep an eye on her?”

“Of course.” Kaito pulls a face. “Just keep yourself safe, okay? I know you’re capable of looking after yourself but if something happens then scream as loud as you can and I’ll come running.”

“I’m sure everything will be fine,” Kaede says with a smile.

Tsumugi gives Kaede an unreadable look as Kaito leads her out of the room. “I’ll come running too. I promise.”

Her words cause Kaede to feel guilty and she feels a small amount of dread as Tsumugi and Kaito leave the room.

“And then there were two,” Rantaro murmurs, smiling awkwardly when Kaede shoots him a glare. “Ah, sorry...”

“There’s no time to joke around,” Kaede tells him. She bites her lip. “Um...”

“...things got pretty heated,” Rantaro says. “Are you okay?”

“Why wouldn’t I be? It was you and Shirogane who were arguing,” Kaede responds. “I just...really didn’t expect that.”

“Believe me, I didn’t expect that either,” Rantaro says. “I also didn’t expect to be accused of murdering Kiibo. I don’t know if you believe me when I say this but I really didn’t hurt him. Why would I spend days keeping him safe to kill him when I was finally getting somewhere with the audio.”

“Did...did you hear something important?” Kaede asks hesitantly.

Rantaro shrugs. “Maybe, although I’m not sure what to think of it. The last thing I heard was Ouma claiming he was the mastermind but...”

“He had to be lying,” Kaede says tiredly. “Because he’s dead and only the mastermind would have a motive to kill Kiibo.”

“I thought keeping him in my room would keep him safe but it only made me look even more suspicious,” Rantaro sighs, running a hand through his hair. “Although that isn’t the main problem now, is it?”

Kaede winces. “...it isn’t fair on Shirogane if I treat you like you’re not a suspect. I think for now...maybe we shouldn’t discuss anything else together.”

“That’s...” Rantaro looks away. “Fair.”

Kaede almost wishes Rantaro would get angry or act unreasonable. Then she’d have a reason to actually suspect him right now. She takes a deep breath before saying, “come on, I’ve decided where I want to take you.”

“Eh? Are you both up to something?”

Monokuma appears in the doorway, wiping what appears to be sweat from his forehead.

“Phew! Destroying a school is hard work!” Monokuma says cheerfully. “It’s such a shame Hoshi wasted his time cleaning his lab out for you Akamatsu! I just finished destroying it! It’s in even more pieces than Kiibo was in when you found him!”

Kaede clicks her tongue impatiently and storms past the bear, pulling Rantaro along by his wrist. She isn’t even going to give Monokuma the satisfaction anymore. She’d rather bite her tongue off than say a single word to him. She’s done with him and his killing game.

“Hey! Where are you both going?” Monokuma follows after them. “I heard arguing whilst I was upstairs! I was rather surprised to see the group fall apart so quickly after three deaths! I thought you’d all be happier. That’s three less people you have to compete with, you know?”

She contemplates kicking the bear down the stairs as she heads up them, noticing that they are covered in a fine layer of dust. However, she’s not brave enough to risk breaking a rule just yet so she instead focuses on reaching her destination.

“Sheesh, tough crowd,” Monokuma comments. “I hope you’re all not planning to do something stupid! You’re both in the end game now! There’s nothing worse than dying just before the game ends.”

Monokuma pauses when Kaede stands outside of the piano room.

“Huh? Are you waiting for me to leave?” Monokuma asks before sighing. “Geez, how rude. Although I must say if you’re both desperate for somewhere private to go then my very luxurious hotel is still open. It’s such a shame no one has used it yet.”

Kaede lets out a small sigh of relief when Monokuma finally leaves and pushes open the door to her piano room quietly, feeling a lot more calmer when she steps inside, letting the door close automatically.

“You want me to wait in here?” Rantaro asks curiously. “But this is your piano room.”

“...something tells me you’re not going to damage anything,” Kaede says. “Think of this as payback for letting me use your room.”

“In that case, thank you, Akamatsu,” Rantaro says. He takes a seat on a bench. “Are you going to keep guard then?”

“That would be the right thing to do,” Kaede answers, taking a seat by her piano. “And fair too.”

“...yeah, that’s right.” Rantaro leans back, resting his head against the wall. “Do you want me to stop talking?”

Kaede licks her lips, realising how dry they’ve become. “I don’t know...”

Rantaro pauses before asking, “hey, did you ever find out if you can still play piano? You mentioned the other day that playing it scared you.”

“I never got the chance actually,” Kaede admits, running a finger over the keys. “Although I doubt I’ll be any good at the moment since my hand is hurt.” That doesn’t stop her from flexing her hands, ignoring the sharp stinging sensation running along the top of her knuckles of her injured hand.

“Hey, don’t play if it’s going to hurt you,” Rantaro says with a slight frown.

Kaede shakes her head softly. "The pain doesn't bother me. Besides...there's a song I want to play for you."

Throwing caution to the wind, Kaede presses down on the piano keys and closes her eyes. With a deep breath, she moves her hands and indulges herself with her favourite song. Clair de Lune echoes around the room gently.

...once this song is over I'll accept reality. I'll accept the truth that I've been hiding from for so long now. I'm not going to run away anymore because...

Kaede knows the piano room isn't the safest place. Anyone can walk in at any time. However, it's the only room in the school with a piano and when words fail her, Kaede knows she can always rely on a piano to convey how she's feeling. She swallows heavily, feeling her eyes sting as her fingers delicately play through the song.

...I know the truth now.

She takes a deep breath as she finishes the song, slowly opening her eyes and looking down at the black and white piano keys. She did it. She managed to play a song without breaking down. The realisation causes a small laugh to escape from her lips.

"I guess I can still play, huh?" Kaede says gently.

"That was..." Rantaro looks lost for words. "Wow, you really are the Ultimate Pianist."

"...thanks."

"Akamatsu..." Rantaro hesitates. "About this morning-"

"I'm sorry I didn't believe you about Shirogane earlier."

Rantaro stares at her dumbfounded. "...what?"

"The truth is I never really had many friends growing up since all I did was play piano," Kaede explains, giving the piano a warm look. "But I never felt lonely. As long as I could play music then everything was okay. However, since I never had many friends I've always been super protective of the ones I have. Being put in a killing game like this...has pushed me far past my limits. The only thing I've been certain about ever since waking up here is that I wanted to keep everyone safe."

She smiles ruefully, closing the piano lid.

"I was even going to turn to murder to save everyone until Ouma stopped me. If it wasn't for him then I wouldn't be here right now. However, every time someone died because of this game I always felt responsible. I've been given a second chance to live and protect you all yet..." Kaede turns to face Rantaro. "I think I'm ready to stop blaming myself now. I don't want to keep hurting. I want to save everyone and that means accepting that...a friend has been lying to me from the very start."

"You..." Rantaro lets out a deep breath, running his hands through his hair with a relieved expression. "God, I really thought in the dining room that...that I messed up, that you and everyone else..."

"I'm sorry for keeping quiet for so long," Kaede says. "If I said I believed you over Shirogane in the dining hall then I don't know what would've happened."

“But why are you so confident that I’m right? The other day you...”

“Amami, I’m not an idiot,” Kaede says with a grim smile. “Shirogane completely lost it this morning. The only reason I kept so quiet is because, well, I just couldn’t believe that someone like her is capable of running a game like this.”

Rantaro quietly takes a couple of breaths, clearly overwhelmed. “We’re going to need evidence to prove that she’s the mastermind. I don’t think everyone else might be as willing to accept the truth. If we can build a concrete case against her then...”

“I’ll do that,” Kaede says. “Alone.”

“What? Wait, why?”

“As far as Shirogane is concerned the two of you have been isolated from everyone else,” Kaede explains. “She won’t suspect much on the off chance that she sees me wandering around the school for whatever reason.”

“But...”

“Besides, I’m not scared of her,” Kaede says. “She’s been lying about being Maki Harukawa too, hasn’t she? I doubt she even knows how to fight properly. If push comes to shove...”

“You’ve proven you’re very good at punching things,” Rantaro says dryly, looking at her fist. “But even so-”

“You know that this is the best option right now,” Kaede says. “And I don’t want anything bad to happen to you. At least if you stay in this room then I’ll know where you are.”

“But what if Momota gets sick again and Shirogane-”

“I believe in Momota,” Kaede reassures him. “I know he’ll keep an eye on Shirogane. The only person I’m worried about right now is you so promise me you’ll stay in here until I get back, okay?”

Rantaro shakes his head helplessly, although it quickly becomes clear that he’s only doing so in disbelief. “...it would be super uncool of me if I made you worry, huh?”

“I promise I’ll check in on you every so often,” Kaede promises. “But promise me you’ll stay in this room unless it’s dangerous for you to do so. If something happens I want you to go to Gonta, okay?”

“I can do that...” Rantaro crosses his arms but it’s clear he’s hugging himself for reassurance. “...please stay safe.”

“You too.”

Kaede makes sure her backpack is firmly on her back and goes to leave before hesitating. At the last second she turns back around and runs towards Rantaro, throwing her arms around him and squeezing tightly.

“Woah! Hey there...”

“I’m really, *really* sorry I’ve been making things so hard for you all this time,” Kaede mumbles into his chest. “But I’m going to make things right now. Believe me, this game is going to end

today.”

Rantaro pauses, arms high in the air in surprise before he lowers them carefully, returning the hug, burying his face into her shoulder. “...I hope that you’re right.”

Kaede Akamatsu - Chapter 4 Part 2

Chapter Notes

Only one chapter left after this one for Kaede's loop!

Thank you to anyone who has been leaving comments! They really do mean a lot! :)

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

Kaede plans where to explore with Rantaro. If she wants to keep Tsumugi from suspecting her then she needs to find evidence of her being the mastermind sooner rather than later. She takes a deep breath as she goes over their plan one last time.

"The first place I need to go is the secret room," Kaede says and Rantaro gives her an encouraging nod.

"That's right. There's something that's bugging me in there and I can't put my finger on it," Rantaro admits. "I'm not sure how helpful Motherkuma is going to be so I'd probably just ignore her for now. I would personally focus on examining the plates of food there one last time."

"...yeah, that's probably for the best," Kaede says with a wince. "Even though the plate in the bin smells really, really bad."

"That's the plate I'm the most concerned about," Rantaro responds. "Because that was Ouma's food, right? There's something that's really bugging me about what we found in the bin."

"You're on about the different shards of glass and plate we found, right?" Kaede puts a hand to her chin. "There's no doubt that the plate smashed when it was put in the bin but I think if I can figure out what the other smashed thing is then that might help."

"If you're planning on doing that then at least find something to protect your hands with," Rantaro says with concern. "There's no point hurting yourself for no reason."

Kaede pauses. "I wonder who might have some gloves..."

"Maybe Angie might have some on her?" Rantaro suggests. "She is an artist, after all. It wouldn't be unrealistic to presume she has a pair on her."

"Ah, maybe you're right..." Kaede sighs. "Hey, did you hear what she said this morning? When Shirogane said something it sounded like...she disagreed with her."

"Then you should talk to her about it," Rantaro says, a conflicted look appearing on his face. "I know that you don't like her and I don't blame you but she's not our enemy, Shirogane and Monokuma are."

"I'm not petty enough to put the group in danger over a grudge," Kaede responds. "Besides, she should be in the girl's bathroom anyway. I can ask her on my way to the secret room if she has some gloves."

Rantaro nods. "So once you're done in the secret room then it's probably for the best if you check out the whiteboards again. I think...if you look hard enough then there might be some sort of connection between this killing game and the previous one."

Kaede bites on her bottom lip. "There's the whiteboard that's still outside and the one in Ouma's room. Ouma's board shows up to four groups of victims and their killers whilst the one outside only shows who is a killer and who is a victim."

"Try putting them side to side and figure something out from there," Rantaro says.

"Hopefully neither Momota or Shirogane spot me," Kaede murmurs. "...I hope Momota is doing okay. I feel kind of nervous leaving him alone with Shirogane for so long. Hopefully she doesn't find out about what I'm up to. At least then Momota will be safe."

"...he'll have to be fine for now," Rantaro says. "I know I sound horrible but we'll be putting him in even more danger if we outright accuse Shirogane straight away. Besides, from the looks of things I think it's Momota who is going to need convincing the most to believe that Shirogane is the mastermind."

"I feel really bad for him," Kaede admits. "He's spent the entire game believing in people and yet..."

"Hey, chin up." Rantaro smiles. "He's got you still as his sidekick, right? As long as he's got one person to believe in then I think he's going to be okay. Momota doesn't seem like the type of person to give up so easily."

"That's right!" Kaede pumps her fists. "Ah! But what if Monokuma tells her about the plan? He can hear everything we're discussing, right?"

Rantaro hums before frowning. "That's a problem we'll have to deal with later. For now we'll just have to hope that he doesn't say anything. If push comes to shove...we can always destroy him. As long as Shirogane isn't able to make any more Monokumas then breaking him shouldn't be a problem."

"I'm surprised he hasn't come running to tell you off for saying that," Kaede laughs. Her laughter stops quickly. "Wait...that's kind of weird actually. Last time we discussed breaking him he got really angry. I'm certain that he's probably listening to us so why hasn't he come to tell us off?"

"...maybe he just doesn't want to," Rantaro suggests. "There's only six of us left now and we've yet to even have a single class trial and I bet he's itching to have one. Perhaps he's...being slightly more lenient with the rules now?"

"That doesn't sound right either," Kaede says, crossing her arms. "I don't know. Something just...doesn't seem right. It feels like this game has been in shambles from the start. Do you think that if the three graduated students were here then things would be different right now?"

"If those three were here then we wouldn't be here right now," Rantaro answers. "Because we have an idea of what happens when all sixteen of us are here."

"But if you put it like that then it sounds like...the game had already been planned out," Kaede says nervously. "Like...I was supposed to kill you and Tojo was supposed to kill Hoshi and..."

"...that does sound a little far-fetched," Rantaro admits quietly. "But I do wonder, if all sixteen of us woke up here again a second time then would the game play out the same way as the previous time we were here?"

“That’s...” Kaede clutches her arm. “Too unreasonable to presume. Why would Shirogane want to play the same game over and over again? Maybe that’s why only thirteen of us were here this time?”

“Perhaps we’ll have to interrogate Shirogane when the time is right,” Rantaro says with a deep frown. “There’s got to be some sort of explanation for all of this and I think she’s the only person who really knows what is going on.”

“But will she really tell us what’s going on if we expose her?” Kaede asks. “If we upset her too much then...”

“She’ll have to tell us if she doesn’t have any other option,” Rantaro reassures her. “It might take some persuading but if we back her into a corner then she’ll have to tell us the truth at some point.”

Kaede flinches. Things are starting to get...real. “...I also need to make sure that I keep everyone’s tablets safe. For now I’ll keep them in my backpack but if something happens to me then-”

“Nothing bad is going to happen to you,” Rantaro insists instantly. “The only enemy you have to deal with right now is Shirogane and she doesn’t know that you suspect her. When the time comes to expose her true identity then I’ll be right by your side.”

Kaede smiles. “When you put it like that...that makes me feel a lot better. Just don’t do anything stupid, okay? I...especially want to keep you safe.”

“Oh? And where is this sudden favouritism coming from?” Rantaro asks curiously, failing to hide the small smile that suddenly appears.

“Geez, don’t take it the wrong way,” Kaede says, rolling her eyes playfully. “I’m just...really glad that you’re here with me, that’s all. If you weren’t here then I think I’d be a mess. I’m not a smart person, Amami. I’m not good at figuring out puzzles or connecting dots. It’s no wonder I died so quickly the first time we were here. I’m too impulsive for a game like this. You think first and act later whilst I’m the complete opposite.”

Rantaro hums, clearly thinking about what to say next very carefully. “Y’know, I’m not perfect either. You’ve been very open about your emotions to everyone whilst I’ve always hidden how I feel. I can’t encourage everyone like you can and I actually don’t mind that. It just means that we have to work together as a team to help everyone. Your strengths are my weaknesses whilst my strengths are your weaknesses. We’re lucky we have each other.”

“See! You always manage to say cool things like that!” Kaede throws her hands into the air. “It’s so unfair!”

“Well I guess I’m just a cool person then,” Rantaro responds, snorting when Kaede lightly punches him on the arm with her uninjured fist. “What? A cool person accepts who they are, you know?”

“You’re just teasing me now,” Kaede grumbles. “Quit distracting me! I need to be serious now! If I mess up now then someone might get hurt and I-”

“You’re more likely to mess up if you stress yourself out,” Rantaro tells her. “I know this might sound stupid but things will be a lot easier for you if you just relax. If you leave this room looking frazzled then everyone who sees you is going to know that something is wrong.”

“...is that why you’re joking around at a time like this?” Kaede asks before putting a hand to her head. “Seriously, how are you always like, one hundred steps ahead of me?”

Rantaro chuckles. "Believe me, I'm not. I'm just rambling at this point and I guess I just...don't want you to actually leave."

"Ah..." Kaede's face softens. She fumbles with the straps of her backpack. "Please don't worry about me. I'm going to be fine. Gonta and Angie are going to be really close when I go into the secret room and Momota will be around when I go into the dormitories. There's really no reason for you to worry."

"Ahaha, that's easy for you to say," Rantaro says as he rubs the back of his head. "The truth is, I'm a really nervous guy. Every time I've let someone leave my sight they've...ah, that's not important right now I suppose."

"If you're this anxious then of course it's important," Kaede says with a frown. "If you tell me what's worrying you then maybe I can try and help reassure you before I go."

Rantaro sighs and crosses his arms. "You know how I have twelve little sisters, right?"

"Yeah?"

"Well..." Rantaro's expression turns pained for a moment before he softens it into something more neutral. "They're missing. All twelve of them are missing across the world. What sort of person manages to lose twelve people? I was in the middle of looking for them when I woke up here."

"Being in a place like this must be really frustrating..." Kaede looks down at the floor as a sad feeling settles in her stomach. Maybe sad isn't the right word to even describe how she's feeling right now. Pity? Sympathy? Either way, she desperately tries to keep her face straight, to stop it from crumpling. It's not like Rantaro's sisters are her own. Does she even have a right to cry for them?

"God, it is," Rantaro admits quietly. The corners of his mouth twitch downwards. "But even though I'm desperate to leave this place I refuse to kill. I'd just be letting down my sisters even more. Well, it's not like I'm going to tell them about this entire experience anyway. There's no point traumatising them even more."

"We're...we're going to leave soon," Kaede promises gently, reaching out a shaky hand to grab his own. "I'm going to get us all out of here."

"I just hate the idea of letting you wander around on your own now," Rantaro says quickly. "It's not that I don't trust you but things are...more serious than ever now. What if I let you out of my sight and I don't get to see you again?"

"Oh..." Kaede grimaces before quickly realising she probably shouldn't be wearing such a negative expression. In her panic, she rocks back and forth on her heels, chewing her bottom lip frantically before saying, "I don't think there's actually anything I can say that will completely reassure you but I can promise that I'm not going to purposefully screw anything up. I know things would be easier on you if you come with me but if Shirogane or Monokuma spot us then..."

"It'd be game over."

Kaede squeezes his hand tighter. "I plan on surviving, Amami. We're all going to leave this place and you're going to find your sisters. If letting me go for a couple of hours means getting out of here then don't you think that's for the best? I'm really, really honoured that you're so worried about me. I'm worried about you too. I promise that I'll try my best to keep safe and if things go south then at least I'll know where to find you if you stay here."

“Of course I know you don’t plan to do anything stupid,” Rantaro says softly. “Ah, you’re probably just better off ignoring me. It’s like I said, I worry a lot. There’s no point worrying you when you need to keep calm-”

“No, you opening up like that gives me a really good reason to be calm,” Kaede reassures him. “It’s like you said before, I’m open about my emotions. When others do the same I can understand them better and that gives me strength.

Rantaro blinks before chuckling. “I didn’t think about that. You really are something, Akamatsu.”

“Well you were the one who said we’re a team!” Kaede grins. “You can be the smart one and I can be the emotional one! Once I’ve found the right amount of evidence I’ll come back to you and you can use that smart head of yours to figure out the best way to stop Shirogane from continuing the game!”

“Ahaha, sounds like I’ve got a very important job to do then,” Rantaro says. “...so I suppose you should get going then.”

“Geez, please stop looking so worried,” Kaede says. “You know how stubborn I can get. If I say I’m going to be fine then I am. I promise I’ll try not to be too long!”

“I know, I know...” Rantaro sighs softly as he pulls his hand away. “...just get going before I lose my confidence. I promise I’ll stay here. Just...”

“I’ll stay safe. I promise.”

Kaede all but runs from the room after that because she knows if she looks back then she won’t want to go. As desperately as she wants to bring him along...it’s too much of a risk. It’s risky enough as it is letting her run around the academy all by herself. At least she can give an excuse to why she’s on her own. If she’s spotted with Rantaro then...

She feels equally determined and terrified as she heads downstairs and towards the girl’s bathroom. It’s a mixture of feelings that she’s felt individually but not all at once. It scares her. It encourages her. It steadies her. She takes a deep breath before pushing open the bathroom door, readying herself. There’s no time to worry now. She’s so close to putting a stop to this game. She’s...

“Ah, Akamatsu!” Gonta greets her as she closes the door. “What you doing here? Is it time to swap already? D-Does Akamatsu not want Gonta in girl’s bathroom anymore because he promises he hasn’t done anything ungentlemanly!”

Kaede giggles as she shakes her head. “I know you haven’t! I just need to check on something! There’s something inside of the secret room that I need to look at.”

“Akamatsu wants to go inside?” Gonta blinks. “Is that safe? Gonta could walk Akamatsu down but he need to protect door. Um...”

“I’ll be fine on my own,” Kaede reassures him. “But I do need to ask Angie something actually.”

Angie’s head snaps up. She’s standing by the sinks, fiddling with her bracelet. “Does...Kaede need Angie’s help?”

“I, um, yeah...” Kaede swallows. For a second she’s in the art room again, kneeling by Tenko as she bleeds out. She furiously shakes her head to get rid of the image. “Do you have a pair of gloves I can borrow?”

“...gloves?” Angie goes through her pockets before pulling out a pair of thin gloves. “Angie uses these to draw with so she doesn’t smudge her work. Will they do?”

“Um...” Kaede hesitates. She’d be rude to decline the gloves but she’s not sure how helpful they’re going to be. “Yeah! I think they’ll work. Thanks!”

Kaede takes the gloves awkwardly, slipping them over her hands. They barely fit since Angie’s hands are much smaller than Kaede’s own. She flexes them and notices how the gloves ride up her palms. Angie must notice as she looks worried.

“Angie is sorry that they’re so small,” Angie says.

“It’s not your fault,” Kaede responds as she gives each glove a firm tug. “I’ll just have to be extra careful!”

“What Akamatsu doing?” Gonta asks curiously. “She not doing something that might hurt her? Because Gonta will help her so she doesn’t have to get hurt if that’s the case!”

“No, I need you to stay on guard,” Kaede insists. “You staying here is really important right now, Gonta. I need you to keep guard whilst I’m in the room so the mastermind doesn’t follow me inside.”

“Ah! Gonta can do that!” Gonta pumps his fists. “Gonta make sure Akamatsu is protected whilst she in room!”

“Angie...will make sure Kaede is safe too,” Angie says quietly. “She won’t move from this room until she has to.”

“That’s...” Kaede smiles. “Thank you. Both of you.”

She muffles a laugh at Gonta’s sound of surprise as she causes the wall to collapse. Her laughter doesn’t last long when she’s once again greeted by a bloody mess. She almost misses the way Angie’s breath catches in her throat as she steps into the hallway.

“Why there so much blood?” Gonta whimpers quietly as Kaede walks away.

She keeps her head held high as she re-enters the room for a third time, ignoring Motherkuma who lets out a squawk when she spots the pianist. However, Motherkuma doesn’t chastise her for whatever reason. Instead, she looks rather curious as Kaede walks past her to grab the mastermind’s, *no*, Tsumugi’s plate of food and heads to the bin.

“You look unusually determined,” Motherkuma comments. “I’d ask why but we both know that *I* already know what *you* know.”

“Can you stop saying know?” Kaede rolls her eyes as she kneels onto the floor, firmly making sure that her skirt is covering her thighs. She’s certain that Motherkuma is just trying to psyche her out and ignores her.

The food that Rantaro poured onto the floor smells as bad as ever. She pinches her nose as she settles herself onto the floor, ignoring how the carpet scratches her legs. Sheesh, Tsumugi sure does have a bad taste in carpets.

Kaede eyes the line of food that stretches out disgustingly on the floor. There’s some mashed potato that is acting as glue, sticking the rest of the food together. However, upon closer inspection Kaede notices that the mashed potato almost looks green, darkening to a dirty brown in some

areas. She gags and moves on, eyeing up the shards of glass and plate poking from the potato.

With furrowed brows, Kaede decides to slowly pluck out the shards of plate from the food first as there's not many of them. Luckily, the plate only broke into a couple of pieces. It takes her a couple of minutes to pluck the shards out with the tips of her fingers. She can't help but notice however that her palms have become slick with sweat. She licks her lips as she puts down the final piece of plate next to her.

She reconstructs the pieces so that she's completely certain that it is a plate. It's a little tricky since there's some tiny pieces missing but she does end up with a circular plate. She's satisfied with her work and moves on to the glass, which she's more hesitant about touching. The edges look a lot more sharper and she doubts Angie's gloves are going to do much to help.

"Just what are you doing?" Motherkuma asks just as Kaede reaches for a piece of glass. Her hand jolts and she pulls it away before she can hurt herself. Motherkuma cackles as Kaede glowers at her. "What? I was only asking."

"You know what I'm doing," Kaede grumbles. "Quit trying to distract me!"

She goes to grab the piece of glass again, thankful that Motherkuma has finally piped down. She picks it up by the centre so her fingers don't press against the edge. Since it's a bigger piece of glass, Kaede decides it's probably safer to examine this one more carefully. She holds it up to the light, pulling a face as some slop drips from it and onto the floor. Initially she thought that the glass was clear. However, thanks to the lighting she now notices that the glass has an almost orange tinge to it.

There's something familiar about this glass that she just can't place her finger on. She places it a fair distance away from herself and rummages around the food carefully to find another big piece to pluck out. Slowly, she gathers more and more pieces and places them next to each other. There's no pieces that stand out just yet and she doubts that she can piece them together like she had done so with the plate.

Kaede notices that Angie's gloves are practically ruined at this point. She does feel a little guilty but tells herself that Angie probably has several other pairs she can use. She gives the gloves another firm tug as she pushes the food around on the floor. A yelp escapes from her as she pushes a little too hard against a hidden shard of glass, which she pulls out quickly and puts it to the side.

Lifting her hand to her face she can see that she's sliced the top of her finger through Angie's gloves. She grits her teeth as she watches a trickle of blood slide down her hand and she wipes the cut on her vest, wincing when her finger throbs unusually hard.

"Oh? Did you cut yourself?" Motherkuma asks curiously. "That's interesting."

"Just shut up," Kaede snaps. She looks at her finger again and frowns. She didn't think that a small cut would hurt so much. She sighs and goes back to digging around in the food again.

A couple more pieces are found and Kaede finally finds enough to let her build a small part of the glass up. The glass clicks gently as Kaede presses pieces together. Since she doesn't have glue, it's harder to keep the pieces aligned, especially since what she's fixing doesn't seem to be a flat object. Her eyes narrow as she slots two pieces together just right. It looks like...the neck of a bottle.

Did Kokichi have a bottle with him when he died? A bottle of what though? Juice? Water? No, water wouldn't be in an orange bottle. Kaede bites her lip before sighing. It's no use. She can't

figure this out on her own.

She wonders if searching anymore is fruitless when something catches her eye. She carefully plucks something from the mashed potato, pulling a face when it starts to roll into itself. Slop drips from it and Kaede gags, looking away momentarily before gritting her teeth and facing the mysterious thing again. From the looks of it, Kaede thinks that she's found a piece of paper or plastic perhaps.

No, she's found a label. That has to be it. She grabs either end of it and pulls, watching as the label unravels almost violently. A particularly large glob of rotten mashed potato drips a little too close to her leg. Kaede shudders before using two fingers to wipe the label clean, wincing when the texture of the food starts to feel a little too gross.

She's thankful when the label is clear enough to read. It's upside down so she turns it the right way up. She reads what's on it then almost drops the label back into the food.

Strike-9 Poison.

Why is something like this down here? Kaede feels her heartbeat quicken as she quickly flips the label over.

Although it requires time to circulate, even a small amount in the body will result in certain death.

Something clicks in Kaede's head.

Did Kokichi...even eat his meal? If I had to guess, it looks like his food hasn't even been touched. It looks like there's the same amount in the bin as there is on Tsumugi's plate. There's a small chance that Kokichi did take a bite from his food but comparing the two poisons that I'm aware of...I don't think the poison Miu used should've caused such a violent reaction from Kokichi. He was choking up so much blood...

The poison Miu claimed she used was a poison for beginners. For now, Kaede thinks it'll be easier if she referred to it as Beginner's Poison. If she's correct, Beginner's Poison was odourless and tasteless and took around half an hour to kick in.

Kirumi had started handing out meals maybe an hour before the time limit was due. Kaede doesn't know when Kokichi received his meal, only that it ended up in the mastermind's bin. Her guesswork suggests that it wasn't touched. It was found with a smashed bottle of Strike-9 Poison. There's no evidence that the Strike-9 Poison was used but also none to suggest it wasn't used either...

"S-Shirogane? Where did that scratch on your neck come from?! That looks so painful!"

Kaede runs a hand down her own neck, her mind flashing back to the day she first noticed the scratch on Tsumugi's neck. It was angry and red. Tsumugi's excuse was that she must've caught her neck whilst in her sleep but...

She noticed the scratch the day after Kokichi died and she's certain it wasn't there the day before. Kaede feels her palm sweat against her neck. She swallows as she moves her hand away but something causes her hand to hover.

"Sh..." Kaede's eyes go wide. *"Sh..."*

Shirogane. He was trying to say Shirogane.

She reaches under her vest and pulls out Kokichi's bedroom key. It's still attached to the orange fabric that he had also pressed into her hand. At first, she thought it was just some random fabric that Kokichi had for some reason. However, she doubts that's the truth now. She unties the fabric and lets the key slip to the floor before tying the fabric once more around the collar of her shirt. If she loops it just right then...

The orange fabric isn't just any fabric, it's Tsumugi's. Her uniform includes an orange bow and...

The fact that Kokichi had this orange fabric on him when he died...combine that with the scratch on Tsumugi's neck...they must've had a fight that Kokichi lost pretty quickly. I think?

Her finger throbs once more and Kaede winces, carefully wrapping her bandaged hand around her finger and giving it a squeeze, hoping that will stop the pain.

She's not sure how to figure out what actually happened. She still doesn't know how Kokichi ended up down here. Was it because he didn't eat his food? Kirumi handed out the meals roughly an hour before the time limit...if Kokichi got a meal first and ate it all straight away then Miu's poison would've had enough time to kick in. However, due to the food ending up in the bin then it seems Kokichi didn't eat his food for some reason.

Did Kokichi not receive a meal he liked? Miu said that Kirumi was preparing everyone's favourite meals but I remember Tenko mentioning that all the meals were almost the same. I didn't...get the same meal as Kokichi or Tsumugi. Ah, I did get the same meal as Miu though since she promised she'd come up with a good meal for us both to have! She also said that she poisoned a meal at random...wait, since I received a meal that was different from everyone else's...did Miu go out of her way to make sure I wouldn't get the poisoned meal?

Of course Miu would request a different meal from everyone else to make sure she didn't accidentally poison herself. However, to go out of her way to make sure Kaede wouldn't get a poisoned meal either...

Miu...deep down she really did have a heart. In the end...did she see me as a friend?

Kaede shakes her head with a heavy heart. Now certainly isn't the time to get distracted. From what she's pieced together, everyone but her and Miu got the same meal and Miu poisoned a meal at random. Due to being the mastermind, Tsumugi probably would've known which plate was poisoned. However, Kaede guesses that Tsumugi made sure she didn't end up with the poisoned plate either. There's no possible way of Tsumugi picking who got the poisoned plate since Kirumi had been the one who had handed them out. Unfortunately, Kokichi had been the unlucky person who got the plate yet...

If I'm going off the presumption that Kokichi didn't eat his food then...how did he end up being poisoned? I don't think he was the type of person who would've sacrificed himself for everyone else and when he died he had looked so scared...no Kokichi didn't kill himself. I'm certain! He was killed but if it wasn't Miu's poison that killed him then that leaves only the Strike-9 Poison...

It must've been taken from upstairs after Kaede had checked through the poison and antidotes one last time. But there's something that doesn't make sense.

If I'm right and Miu isn't the killer then...why did Monokuma let her graduate? We didn't have a class trial so it's not like we could've discussed things and all the evidence to suggest that she's actually not the killer had been hidden down here...on purpose. Just like how Kokichi had been hidden.

Kaede lets out a shaky breath as she pulls herself up from the floor, giving the food on the floor a horrified look.

Kokichi had been hidden to the very last second, right? When I found him the time limit was almost over. However, he was coughing up so much blood. Since he had no visible wounds then his only cause of death had to have been poison. He didn't eat his meal so Miu's poison didn't enter his system, meaning the only poison that could've killed him was...the Strike-9 Poison and since the bottle of that ended up in the mastermind's bin along with his food then the only person who could've killed Kokichi Ouma was...

"Ah!" Kaede winces as she stumbles, feeling lightheaded for a moment.

"What's wrong, dear?" Motherkuma asks annoyingly. "You're not hurt, are you?"

"No, I'm..." Kaede puts a hand to her head, whimpering when her vision blurs for a moment. When did the room get so hot? "...fine."

"You look like you're going to fall over any moment," Motherkuma continues. "Please be a dear and not die right in front of me. It'd be awfully rude."

"Shut the hell up." Kaede inhales through her nose and out through her mouth. "I'm fine. I've just found some damning evidence against this killing game so I'm actually feeling pretty good!"

"Is that so?" Motherkuma sneers curiously. "Well, good luck then!"

"Good luck? I'm going to put an end to your killing game soon! Why aren't you more worried?" Kaede asks, pretending that Motherkuma's rather tame reaction doesn't worry her.

Motherkuma hums. "I'm a floating robot head, Akamatsu. Do you really think I do things like worry?"

Kaede growls as she passes Motherkuma. She's still got the label in her hand and she gives it a tight squeeze and listens as the plastic crinkles. She is careful not to damage it too much though since it's evidence that she needs to keep safe.

When she re-enters the girl's bathroom she winces at how bright the room is. Had the lights in here always been this bright? It's not like it matters much anyway. She carefully slips Angie's gloves off but hesitates when she goes to hand them back to her.

"I accidentally ruined them," Kaede admits as Angie looks down at the gloves quietly. "Um, sorry..."

"Angie has lots of pairs so it's fine," Angie says quietly. "...Angie sees that Kaede cut her finger. Do you want Angie to clean that for you?"

"It's just a scratch," Kaede says. "And there's no time. T-Thanks for the offer but..."

"Akamatsu should look after herself properly!" Gonta frets with a frown. "There's always time to look after yourself when hurt! If you leave cut then it might get worse!"

"I can bandage it later," Kaede insists. "But I can't take a break to do so right now. There's something really important I need to be doing."

"But-"

Kaede feels guilty when she talks over Gonta. "Once I'm finished with what I'm doing then I'll let you bandage me up, okay? But I really need to get going right now."

"What is Kaede doing?" Angie suddenly asks as Kaede reaches the bathroom door. The pianist sighs. "She didn't say why she wanted to go into the--"

"I'm ending the game," Kaede snaps as she turns around. "So stop disturbing me, okay? I'm really busy right now so--"

"How is Kaede ending the game?" Angie asks hesitantly, flinching when Kaede gives her a dry look. "Is Kaede...trying to figure out who the mastermind is?"

"Something like that," Kaede murmurs. "Seriously, I need to go--"

"Angie knows Kaede has no reason to trust her but..." Angie fiddles with the sleeves of her yellow jacket. "Actually, no one has any reason to trust Angie. Not even Angie trusts Angie..."

"...do you know something?" Kaede asks.

"Angie..." Angie grimaces. "Angie saw...who killed Kiibo but Angie didn't say anything earlier because she didn't know...because if she said who she saw...because Kaede is friends with..."

"...it was Shirogane, wasn't it?" Kaede almost feels bad when Angie's face morphs into one of surprise. "Shirogane killed Kiibo because she's the mastermind and didn't want us to figure out too soon."

Angie swallows. "Angie's God has been telling her for a long, long time that Shirogane is a bad person. If Angie hadn't been so stupid so many days ago then...maybe a lot more people would be alive right now. Or if Angie had been just a little quicker--"

"Shirogane knew she was going to be okay the moment she stepped into the art room," Kaede says. "Because since she's the mastermind she's always going to be protected. Angie, you had no chance of killing her and...what happened to Chabashira was a horribly timed accident."

Angie sucks in a breath before going back to playing with her coat sleeves. "...Angie still shouldn't have tried to take matters into her own hands. Angie hated Shirogane because she thought she was an assassin. She didn't even think about the possibility of her running the game. Now that Angie knows Shirogane is an even worse person than she thought she was..."

"You must feel super conflicted," Kaede says gently.

"If Angie had killed Shirogane then all of this would be over but..." Angie rubs her eyes with the palms of her hands. "Angie realises she doesn't want to be a killer. Because of her actions, two of our friends died and even now Angie is being so useless!"

"But Angie not useless!" Gonta suddenly interrupts the two. "Angie make mistake but at least she not trying to make same mistake twice! She keeping secret room safe with Gonta so mastermind doesn't cause more problems!"

"That isn't enough for Angie!" Angie insists. "Angie needs to repent for what she's done! So..."

"Angie, please calm down," Kaede says warily. She gives Gonta a pleading look. "I'm so sorry for leaving you like this but I need to go and gather more evidence against Shirogane. Thank you so much for telling me about Kiibo. That's really going to help in the long run, you know?"

Angie snuffles against her coat sleeve. "Angie is just glad Kaede believes her despite everything."

An uncomfortable feeling settles in her chest as Kaede leaves the room. She should be ecstatic that she's found a witness to Kiibo's murder but she just feels hollow. She's spent so long being angry at Angie that she didn't even stop to think about how much Angie has been suffering.

Kaede clears her throat and heads outside, marching towards the whiteboard that's been outside all this time. Good thing that the glass walls have stopped any rain from coming through. The whiteboard looks untouched and has been preserved well. Kaede starts to wheel it towards the dormitories, narrowing her eyes and spying through the glass to make sure that neither Tsumugi or Kaito are around.

She has to wrestle with the whiteboard to drag it upstairs towards Kokichi's room. Every time it thumps against a step she winces. She's trying her best to keep quiet but wow, this whiteboard really doesn't want to be cooperative. When she finally gets it upstairs she's drenched with sweat and she's grateful that there's no one around to see her.

Unlocking Kokichi's door, Kaede pushes the whiteboard into the already cramped room and sighs, tugging at her vest. She's so...tired. She hadn't expected hauling the whiteboard upstairs would've wiped her out so effectively but it's not like there's much she can do about it.

She wipes her clammy forehead with the sleeve of her shirt and wheels the whiteboard so it's awkwardly standing next to Kokichi's.

It's not rocket science to figure out who isn't the mastermind based on the whiteboards. Kokichi's whiteboard gives damning evidence that at least nine people are innocent. Last time everyone was here, Kaede killed Rantaro first. Then, for whatever reason Kirumi killed Ryoma. Korekiyo decided to kill both Tenko and Angie. The most surprising murderer is Gonta, who killed Miu. However, Kokichi's whiteboard stops there which means Kaede is going to have to do some guess work.

There's a group of six people on Kokichi's whiteboard that have been put together. The three graduates, Kaito, Tsumugi and Kiibo. Straight away Kaede can eliminate Kiibo from being the mastermind due to him dying this time around. That leaves Tsumugi and Kaito being the final two suspects based on the whiteboards.

Kaede frowns when she turns to the whiteboard Kokichi and Monokuma set up together. Tsumugi has been listed as a victim whilst Kaito has been listed as a killer. There's not much proof to really guess who killed Kokichi and who killed Tsumugi.

If the mastermind is the same person each game then...it should be fair to say Tsumugi lived right until the very end of the last game but ended up being killed by either Kiibo or Kaito. Since Kokichi's whiteboard stops at four murders then I think Kokichi must've been the fifth victim of the last killing game, right? Evidence proves that he likes to document things so maybe his death came out of nowhere? Either that or something happened which meant he couldn't get into his room anymore.

Kaede's eyes flicker between the boards. If she's going off the presumption that Tsumugi lived right until the very end then...she's going to guess that it was maybe Kaito who killed Kokichi during the first game. There's a possibility that Kaito was ill during the last game and he seems like the type of person to sacrifice themselves if needed. If that's the case then that leaves Kiibo as Tsumugi's killer.

If only Kiibo hadn't been killed...

Kaede puts a hand to her head as she thinks, ignoring how her head has started to throb. Right away she can dismiss nine people from the whiteboards alone. If she's right about Kaito killing Kokichi then those two can be dismissed too. The three graduates can also be taken out of the equation since there's been zero evidence of them being here during this game. That leaves Kiibo and Tsumugi and since Kiibo is dead...

That's even more evidence against Tsumugi! Due to Angie's statement, Kaito is one hundred percent not the mastermind and since Kiibo is dead, Tsumugi can be the only student here who is capable of being the mastermind! All I need to do now is get Rantaro and get him to explain to everyone in a way I can't about Tsumugi being the mastermind!

Kaede lets out a sigh of relief as she slumps back against Kokichi's bed for a second, wiping her brow once more. She's done it, she's found actual evidence to use against Tsumugi. With that she can...

Kaede coughs.

It's a cough that crawls up her throat and forces its way out of her. She shudders as she puts a hand over her mouth, her other hand digging into Kokichi's bed sheets as she stumbles to the side, almost losing her balance as she tries to keep herself up right.

Why do I feel so bad all of a sudden?

She coughs again into her hand and her eyes burn when she feels how wet her cough is. Her lungs burn as she crouches down onto the floor, her grip on the bed sheets still tight. She squeezes her eyes shut. Maybe she shouldn't have pushed herself so hard getting the whiteboard into Kokichi's room. Yeah, that's probably the problem right now. She licks her lips uncomfortably and almost chokes when she tastes...

Blood?!

Her hand trembles as she pulls it away from her mouth. She instantly notices how her hand is neon pink and dripping. A droplet of blood splatters onto her shoe and she's grateful that she's at least not spewing blood onto the floor.

Another cough crawls up her throat and she curls in on herself, fully slumping against the floor as her body trembles. Why is she...she doesn't understand. She was fine this morning! Well, fine until Korekiyo tried to kill her but Ryoma saved her, right? Also because of everything, everyone skipped breakfast so she hasn't eaten anything since last night so...

She bolts to the bathroom when she feels her throat fill up dangerously quick, gripping the sides of the toilet seat as she empties her stomach into the toilet. Her eyes water as she warily eyes all the blood in the toilet mixed with her spit. She quickly flushes it all away and pulls herself up, forcing herself to leave Kokichi's room as soon as possible.

She fumbles with the bedroom key as she locks the door, biting her tongue so she doesn't let out a frustrated yell as she barely manages to lock the door. Walking down the stairs becomes a difficult task when the entire room is spinning around. Kaede grips onto the stair railings tightly as she makes it down the stairs and goes to leave when her room catches her eye.

If she dies before...

With a heavy gasp she stumbles into her room, grabbing the doorframe tightly and all but throwing herself inside and towards her own whiteboard. She's thankful that she left all the items she needs

for the whiteboard down here. With sticky fingers she puts Ryoma and Korekiyo up on the whiteboard before grabbing a photograph of Tsumugi and Kiibo, pinning them both up.

A whine escapes from her as her only whiteboard pen slips from her grip and rolls under her bed. She contemplates reaching for it before another cough cuts her off and she covers her mouth once more. She scrunches her face up as she dips a finger into her blood and starts to furiously circle Tsumugi's picture, unable to bring herself to do much more before she falls to the floor, landing on her hands and knees.

She instinctively goes to lick her lips and shudders when she ends up coating her tongue with even more blood. Her hand grabs at her bed to help her stand up but she ends up falling back onto the floor with a thump. Fine, if her legs aren't going to cooperate then she'll just crawl.

Kaede uses her elbows and arms to drag herself across her bedroom floor and out of her room. She pauses to catch a breath and freezes in horror when she hears the sound of a door creaking open.

"Can you at least check?" Kaede can hear Tsumugi ask. "You heard all that banging earlier, right? I think something is wrong."

"Fine, fine, if it gets you to calm down," Kaito responds. "But you need to stay here, okay? If you start wandering around alone then people will get suspicious and we both know that you're innocent!"

Kaede stares at the floor with a feeling she can't put her finger on, grimacing when she hears Kaito walk down the steps. Of course it doesn't take him that long to spot her and she's surprised he doesn't break an ankle as he jumps down the final four steps just to reach her.

"Holy shit, Kaede," Kaito murmurs as he carefully puts a hand on her shoulder. "Are you okay? Wait, that's a stupid question. What the hell happened? Are you hurt? Show me where you're hurt-"

"I..." Kaede lifts her head up from the floor and Kaito gapes at her as blood steadily trickles from her mouth. "I need *help*."

"That's fucking obvious..." Kaito sounds distant as he puts a hand to his own mouth. "I didn't think that people could catch what..."

"I can't hear you," Kaede says as she forces herself to her knees, arms trembling the entire time. When they give out on her, she expects to smash her face against the floor. Instead, Kaito catches her and helps roll her to her side so she can sit up at least. "Ah...thank you."

"...please tell me that you're actually hurt," Kaito murmurs and Kaede raises an eyebrow. "Please tell me this isn't my fault-"

"Why is any of this your fault?" Kaede asks before throwing her hands over her mouth as another cough erupts from her. "Ah..."

"I-It doesn't matter," Kaito insists, clearly panicked. When he had found Tenko he had been the calm one of the group. Now his eyes look wild and desperate. "If I put you to bed then you can rest-"

"N-No, I need you to..." Kaede lets out a harsh breath. "Get Amami. Please. I-I need him-"

"Amami?" Kaito licks his lips. "I can't leave you here on your own-"

“Please!” Kaede begs. “I need him, Momota. Please get him. *Please-*”

“O-Okay!” Kaito looks at Kaede and then up at his room. “At least let me get Maki-”

“*No!*”

“W-Why are you shouting?!” Kaito looks alarmed. “Kaede, I’m not leaving you alone! I don’t care if you think Maki is suspicious! She’s not going to hurt you-”

“Momota! *Please* just shut up and get Amami!” Kaede yells and feels something warm and wet trickle down her cheeks. “I *need*...he...”

Kaito lets out a loud noise of frustration before darting out of the dormitories, leaving Kaede to slump against the wall in relief. Her breathing is a lot heavier than she’s used to and she can hear every breath she can take.

She closes her eyes even though she knows that is a very stupid thing to do right now and leans her head against her door frame.

This...can’t be it, can it? I don’t even know what happened. Why...is this happening to me? Did I mess up? Am I dying? But I don’t want to die. I have so much I want to do. I-I want to see my family again. I want to leave with everyone. I-I want to help Rantaro find his sisters...

Kaede’s throat burns as she coughs again and she opens her eyes to inspect the damage only to almost slump over in surprise when she sees Tsumugi crouched down in front of her with an unreadable expression on her face that quickly switches to one of surprise.

“Akamatsu?! What happened?!” Tsumugi’s eyes go wide with fake concern. “Let me help you-”

“Get off!” Kaede slaps Tsumugi’s hand away when it gets close to her shoulder. “I don’t want...I don’t want your help.”

Tsumugi chews her lip. “You’re not thinking straight! I’m your friend so of course I want to help you!”

“You’re *not* my friend,” Kaede snaps. “Y-You never were!”

“I think you losing so much blood has made you delusional,” Tsumugi says as she doesn’t give Kaede a choice but to stand up, hooking the pianist’s arm around her shoulder and lifting.

Kaede’s entire body protests and she wants to tell Tsumugi off but blood seeps into her mouth once more. She closes her eyes as the world spins from Tsumugi’s insistence of walking her to her bed.

“Don’t worry, Akamatsu. I’m sure everything will be okay,” Tsumugi says as she steps into Kaede’s room. “You don’t look hurt so maybe you just have a bug or something.”

If Kaede wasn’t on the brink of coughing out another mouthful of blood then she would’ve rolled her eyes at Tsumugi’s stupid choice of words. Instead a pained sound escapes from her as blood trickles from her lips and stains her vest. Tsumugi isn’t even trying to be careful with her. Bitch.

What Kaede doesn’t expect is for Tsumugi to suddenly drop her and she lands on the floor with a thud. Kaede lifts her head up to see Tsumugi staring at her whiteboard with a blank expression. Then, to Kaede’s horror, Tsumugi grabs her own picture and scrunches it up with her hands.

“We don’t want people getting the wrong idea now, do we?” Tsumugi says a little too cheerfully as

she puts the ruined photograph into her pocket. “After all, I’ve already said I’m not Kiibo’s killer.”

“You are,” Kaede spits. “I know you are-”

Tsumugi rolls her eyes almost playfully, as if she was having a conversation with a child who thinks they’re right when they’re actually wrong. “Isn’t it innocent until proven guilty? You can’t blame me for something if there’s no evidence-”

“Stop it! Just *stop* it!” Kaede shrieks, a pained yell escaping from her as she pulls herself up to face Tsumugi. “Stop *pretending* that you’re my friend! You’re the mastermind and everyone knows it so *just stop!*”

Tsumugi tilts her head to the side. “...stop what?”

“Everything!” Kaede coughs again. “The killing game! Pretending that you’re on our side! Just...stop it...”

“Ah...” Tsumugi kneels down and Kaede winces when she cups her cheeks. “Even when you’re dying you’re still fighting. How can you have so much hope when you’re in such a despairing situation?”

“I’m not...” Kaede swallows heavily. “I’m not dying. I’m just-”

“Heeey, you didn’t actually go through my bin, did you?” Tsumugi asks and Kaede stares at her. She’s not even pretending to be innocent anymore and that makes Kaede’s blood boil. “I mean, you were supposed to at some point but I didn’t actually think you’d shove your hands into glass, especially if the glass used to be a bottle filled with poison.”

“I...” Kaede breath catches in her throat. “...I.”

“Oh poor, Akamatsu!” Tsumugi uses her thumb to wipe under her eye. “You read the label right? Even just a tiny bit of Strike-9 Poison can kill you!”

“You’re...insane,” Kaede mumbles. “You’re not even trying to hide the fact-”

“I’ve got Momota to fight for me,” Tsumugi says with a smile. “And Gonta is so stupid! If I just start to cry then he’ll feel bad and trust me even if he knows I’m guilty deep down! As for Angie...I don’t care what that murderous bitch thinks about me. She should’ve killed me when she had the chance.”

Kaede swallows. So this is the real Tsumugi Shirogane, huh? “Amami is going to prove you wrong-”

“Is he?” Tsumugi hums. “I mean, he can try! It might even be entertaining to watch him try and paint me as the villain! But, well, I actually have an even better idea!”

Kaede freezes as Tsumugi all but yanks her backpack from her shoulders and cries out in pain when she reaches to grab it back. Tsumugi smiles as she dangles it just out of reach, swinging it back and forth slowly.

“Let’s see if Akamatsu was smart enough to put the tablets somewhere else,” Tsumugi sings as she opens the backpack. “Oh look! She wasn’t.”

Kaede’s face burns with shame. “Shirogane, stop it.”

Tsumugi hums to herself as she pulls out the first tablet and checks it. “Oh, this is your tablet! I don’t need that one!”

The pianist flinches as Tsumugi carelessly throws it to the side. “H-Hey-”

“And this one is mine!” Tsumugi says as she checks the second tablet. She places it down by her feet and pulls out the last tablet. “Meaning this tablet has to be Amami’s, right?”

“W-Why do you want...” Kaede retches into her hand. “Shirogane, please just stop it.”

“But we’re in the end game now, Akamatsu!” Tsumugi’s eyes shine brightly. “This is where things finally get exciting! Buuut...”

Kaede’s hand trembles as she continues to reach for Rantaro’s tablet. “S-Shirogane-”

“Usually there’s five people in a finale!” Tsumugi grabs either end of Rantaro’s tablet. “And there’s currently six of us and that won’t do at all! This entire game has been a mess from the start but I’m getting my grand finale! A proper one!”

“W-Wait, no, Shirogane, wait-”

“I mean, punishing someone for breaking a rule doesn’t hit the same as punishing someone for murder but it’s not like we’ve had a single class trial anyway,” Tsumugi says as she lifts up a knee. “Oh well!”

Kaede shrieks as Tsumugi brings the tablet down onto her knee and snaps it in half, letting the two pieces fall to the floor. The pianist’s shaking hand hovers helplessly. She’s too...scared to move because maybe if she stays frozen then time itself will freeze and...

...and...

Kaede’s hand trembles into a fist and she ignores the pain that runs through her entire body as she slowly pulls herself up, using her bed as a crutch to stand onto her feet.

“Oh? Where do you think you’re going?” Tsumugi asks curiously. “Monokuma is going to arrive any minute, you know?”

Kaede doesn’t answer, wiping her mouth with her sleeve and staining her shirt pink. She stumbles as she takes a step forward and another one, ignoring Tsumugi’s amused expression...

...which Kaede promptly knocks from Tsumugi’s face with a heavy punch that causes both of the girls to stagger backwards.

Kaede Akamatsu - Finale

Chapter Notes

This is the final chapter of Kaede's loop! I think this is the chapter that has caused me the most hassle so far! Even now I'm not sure if it's completely perfect but I'm satisfied enough with it to post it. I just can't believe that the fic is this long already ahaha, I didn't expect Kaede's loop to last this long!

Thank you for the comments! They do mean a lot!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

Tsumugi laughs at her.

She *laughs* at her as if she hasn't just been decked in the face. Her pale cheek is already turning an angry colour and there's no doubt that it's going to bruise heavily later. Tsumugi does raise a hand to delicately feel her cheek but it's almost as if she doesn't even care that Kaede hit her.

"Oh wow, you certainly do know how to punch people!" Tsumugi smiles and, wow, she certainly has a way of making such a warm and good natured expression look scary as hell. "But you're just wasting your energy, you know?"

She's unfairly right and it pisses Kaede off. The pianist staggers backwards and almost topples into her bed. She's pretty sure it's pure adrenaline that's keeping her standing at this point. Everything hurts. It's a pain she's never experienced before. Even her worst fever hadn't felt this bad. She wipes a layer of cold sweat from her forehead and grits her teeth.

"I...don't care anymore," Kaede spits back and her knuckles crack as her fist trembles. She's done with Tsumugi and she's done with the game. She's...dying and an ugly desperation to drag Tsumugi down with her tempts her just a little too much. "There's not even...the right words to...describe how much I *hate*-"

Tsumugi rolls her eyes and easily pushes Kaede on the shoulder, forcing the pianist to sit down on her bed. "Yeah, yeah, you hate me. Can we save this for later? I'm serious about you not pushing yourself. If you die too soon then things are going to get boring!"

"And?" Kaede stares at her incredulously. "Do you think I care about that? Do you...really think that I care about anything...you say anymore?"

"Obviously not, even I'm not that naïve," Tsumugi admits with a pout. "But I think you're failing to realise that the game is going to end soon now! I mean, wow! This game sucked but I'm sure once..." Tsumugi's eyes cloud over as a disappointed look takes over her face. "Well, I'm sure this game was just a glitch or something!"

Kaede grimaces as her entire body throbs viciously. "W-What are you-"

"Oh! I should probably save everything for the class trial!" Tsumugi clasps her hands behind her back. "Because you've done a very thorough investigation, haven't you? I mean, it's kind of boring when only one person investigates but I'm sure the class trial is going to make up for it!"

Kaede can only wonder what the actual hell Tsumugi is rambling on about. The cosplayer looks like she's ready to start drooling at any moment. "You-"

"I guess I am plainly curious to see how things are going to play out with you in charge," Tsumugi says. "But even you have to admit that it's a pain when you're watching something and the main character just...doesn't feel right."

She's too tired to argue. Kaede simply glares at Tsumugi.

"But don't get me wrong, Akamatsu!" Tsumugi smiles sweetly. "It really has been fun playing the game with you in charge! Well, not in charge of the game but everyone else. You really are like a video game protagonist!"

Kaede hardens her glare and hugs her arms tightly around her stomach. "You're seriously insane."

"That's not very nice, you know?" Tsumugi shakes her head. "We just have different viewpoints, that's all. I mean, obviously! You're the hero and I'm the villain, right?"

It's probably for the best to ignore her. Kaede turns her head to the side, holding back a whimper as her body angrily protests against having to still function. It's sort of funny in a way. She's got so much pent up anger that the fact that she's well and truly dying hasn't actually hit her. Of course she doesn't want to die but what she cares about the most right now is taking that stupid grin off Tsumugi's face and making her pay.

Tsumugi tuts. "Seriously? You're just going to ignore me? This is why I didn't want a normie character like you to stick around for so long. It's like, you're sort of really predictable. Oh look at me! I'm Kaede Akamatsu and everyone loves me and I'm going to stop this killing game with the power of friendship!"

Kaede flinches.

"God, I mean, it gets a little pathetic when the only thing you talk about is ending the killing game. Like, good for you I guess! It'd be cool to actually see you do so instead of crying all the time." Tsumugi pulls a face. "But now you're actually at the end of the game you're sitting around and still waiting for someone else to fix everything for you."

How has someone so vile been in plain sight this entire time? The way that Tsumugi is easily disregarding her is disturbing to say the least.

Kaede doesn't know what's worse, Tsumugi's words or the fact Kaede had been foolish enough to even care about her in the first place. For crying out loud she had even defended her when Rantaro had first suspected her of being the mastermind! Forget feeling embarrassed over making a mistake, Kaede hasn't felt this humiliated in her entire life. It doesn't help that Tsumugi is practically laughing in her face too.

However, Kaede can't help that Tsumugi is trying to lure her into one last trap. She's already tricked everyone long enough for six people to die and because she broke Rantaro's tablet...it's almost as if she's trying to push Kaede over the edge. Surely Tsumugi isn't this cruel, right? If she's wholeheartedly enjoying this entire situation then...

Tsumugi is truly trying to drag her into a different sort of darkness, no, into the darkest of *despair*. Oh how easy it would be just to give up right now. She's dying anyway and someone she really, *really* cares about is going to die too...

"H-Hey..." Kaede swallows heavily. "You know how...you let the wrong person go for...Ouma's

death?”

Tsumugi pulls a face. “Akamatsu, I’m not sure if the poison is making you stupid but I’ve already said that there’s going to be a class trial so-”

“I’m not...I’m not smart,” Kaede says quietly. “A-And I don’t know the purpose of this game b-but I know that there’s rules and you and Monokuma h-haven’t been following them properly.”

“We’ve been following them perfectly,” Tsumugi insists. “Me intervening with the situation with Ouma is more of a grey area to be honest. If he hadn’t died then everyone would be dead right now, you know?”

Kaede looks at Tsumugi like she’s grown a second head. She’s seriously not expecting Kaede to be grateful, is she? “I-If you get to break the rules then...so do I.”

“Oh? I mean go ahead,” Tsumugi offers. “It’s not like you can cause much damage in the state you’re in.”

Kaede narrows her eyes. “T-Tell Amami and Momota when they come...that it’s my t-tablet that’s broken, not Amami’s.”

Tsumugi blinks a couple of times before bursting out into laughter. “That’s...oh, Akamatsu. Why would I do that? You’re needed in the final class trial! You’re the one with all the evidence against me, remember?”

“If I’m able to figure out that you’re a bad person then everyone else can too.”

“I mean, yeah, they can,” Tsumugi agrees before tapping her cheek slowly. “But for the hero of the game to die right at the climax? I know I said this game has been rubbish but I don’t want it to be a complete disaster either. I’m going to enjoy myself as much as I can and I’m especially enjoying watching you suffer right now! Ah...” Tsumugi shudders. “Wow, I apologise for that. That was a little *too* edgy even for me.”

Like Kaede even cares. “I’m not the hero of this g-game. The hero wouldn’t have let so many people d-die! You’re right, I am p-pathetic but, fuck...” She coughs so hard that she swears her ribcage is going to rattle. “I-I tried! I *tried*, okay? I-I’ve been so desperate to save everyone that...it’s cost people to get to this p-point. I’m dying, Shirogane. I-If you’re so desperate to paint me as the hero then let me save at least *one* person.”

“...I’m not sure who is acting more cliché at the moment,” Tsumugi mutters, crossing her arms and looking at the floor with a look of pure boredom. “You want to save Amami, right? Why? You’ve only known him for like a week. And Amami is a huge normie, you know?”

“Unlike you I actually care about people,” Kaede snaps.

Tsumugi snorts and if Kaede had the energy she would’ve punched her a second time. “Sorry, sorry! It’s just...ah, it’s just really funny that you say that but there’s no point spoiling anything just yet. Cool, cool, you have a little crush on Amami. It’s cute, I guess.”

Does Tsumugi have an off button? Then again if Kiiibo was around to read Kaede’s thoughts then he’d think she’s being extremely robophobic at the moment. Still, there’s not a lot Kaede wouldn’t do right now if it means Tsumugi keeps quiet. Hate isn’t even a strong enough word to describe how Kaede is feeling right now.

“If you t-think I’m making it through a c-class trial then you’re wrong,” Kaede says. “I-I don’t

want to die b-but...”

Dying...is kind of scary, huh? Kaede always imagined that she'd live until she was old with grey hairs. Maybe she would be live in a cottage with a husband or wife and would get to play piano as much as she wants. She definitely didn't expect to die in a killing game run by a bear and some girl who has deluded herself enough to think she's having fun.

“You know, as basic as you are there's always been one thing I've always admired about you,” Tsumugi admits. “And that's despite not knowing someone for so long, you'd still die for them. I mean, when you say it out loud dying for someone you don't even know that well is kind of stupid. It's not like you owe them anything yet...” The cosplayer sighs heavily. “Man, it sucks that the game didn't play out the way it should've. You would've had such a more impactful death instead of whatever the hell you've got going on right now.”

“H-How can you say such things so easily?” Kaede asks. “Is this game fun to you? Are you seriously e-enjoying yourself?”

Tsumugi blinks and Kaede realises she's caught her off guard. “Well of course I have to have fun. I'm the mastermind. I want this game as much as you want it to end.”

“Really?” Kaede frowns. “B-Because from what it sounds like you're more concerned about...m-making this game entertaining. But for who?”

“Well that's a question that will be answered later,” Tsumugi responds before her eyes light up. “Finally! Everyone else is here! I was starting to get a little bored waiting around.”

Kaede chews on her bottom lip as she watches everyone burst into the dormitories. She's slightly concerned when Gonta and Angie arrive too but she doesn't have the energy to remind them why they were guarding the bathroom in the first place.

“Oh, Maki!” Kaito looks surprised. “Kaede didn't want...well, that doesn't matter now does it? Thanks for moving her to her bed-”

“Akamatsu, what happened?”

Rantaro knocks Kaito out of the way to push into Kaede's room. Kaede feels guilty when she sees how frazzled he looks despite her being the one who is probably in the most danger right now. However, she's grateful when he becomes a barrier between herself and Tsumugi, who looks a little too amused.

“The glass in the bin,” Kaede says before swallowing, “it used to be a bottle of poison a-and I...”

She holds up her cut finger. It's not bleeding anymore but since she's been coughing so much her finger is stained bright pink. Rantaro holds it carefully and his face darkens with worry. “I knew something was up with the food in the bin but I didn't think that...”

“Akamatsu poisoned?!” Gonta pales quickly. “B-But there no...anti, um, antidote!”

Kaito puts a hand to his hip as he raises an eyebrow. “Poison? How...no, that doesn't matter! Hey, Maki. You can help her, right? There's got to be some way to get it out of her system without antidote-”

“Momota, she's plainly dying,” Tsumugi says before crossing her arms. “Once someone has been poisoned then they have no chance of surviving without an antidote. Or, well, if the poison isn't that bad then they'll just be ill for a couple days.”

“T-Then she just needs to rest, right?” Kaito stammers. It’s difficult to tell if he’s just delusional or in denial. “I always feel better after a bit of rest so it has to be the same for Kaede! C’m on, sidekick. Let’s get you under the covers and-”

“Resting isn’t going to help me,” Kaede says before her eyes go to the broken tablet on the floor. “Besides, there’s something a lot more important that needs to be addressed right now. I-Isn’t that right, Shirogane?”

“You want to jump right to it?” Tsumugi blinks before her lips curl into a smile. “That’s a little brutal of you, Akamatsu.”

“What are you on about?” Rantaro frowns before turning to Kaede. “Did something happen, Akamatsu? She’s not forcing you to do anything, right?”

“Why would Maki force her to do anything?” Kaito asks with a frown of his own. “Is this about the whole mastermind thing? Seriously, Amami, just drop it. That’s not important right now-”

“It is,” Kaede argues and her stare hardens when Kaito’s jaw hangs open. “M-Momota, just turn around and look at Shirogane. She isn’t e-even bothering to hide who she is anymore.”

Kaito stares at her incredulously before turning around very slowly. For a moment, Kaede is certain that Tsumugi is going to act like nothing’s wrong. The cosplayer has a blank expression on her face that quickly morphs into a large smile. “She’s not wrong, Momota. If you had just actually used your brain for one second during this entire game then you would’ve figured me out a lot sooner.”

Fuck. Tsumugi isn’t even trying to soften any of her blows. The cosplayer simply waits for Kaito to react to her confession patiently. Kaito, on the other hand, clearly doesn’t even know what to say or do. Even with his back turned to her, Kaede guesses that the expression he’s wearing isn’t good.

“Huh? Are you not going to say anything?” Tsumugi pouts and waves her hand in front of Kaito’s face. “Hello? Earth to Momota? Hellooo?”

“Shirogane, stop it,” Rantaro snaps. “What are you even trying to accomplish? If you’re just trying to make things worse-”

Tsumugi lets out an ugly laugh. “Maybe if you look a little to your right then you’ll see how bad things are going to get, Amami.”

Rantaro turns his head and Kaede quickly grabs his face a little too roughly, cradling his face with her hands and looks him in the eye. “M-My tablet broke-”

“Ugh? Seriously? Even though I said-”

“...huh?” Rantaro blinks, moving one hand to softly bat Kaede’s own away. “...you must be mistaken-”

“Of course she’s mistaken!” Tsumugi rolls her eyes. “It’s *your* tablet that’s broken! Not hers! And the rules state that you can’t break your tablets so-”

Kaede tightens her grip. “Amami, please look at me. P-Please. S-She’s gotten away with murder before. Shirogane is the one who k-killed Ouma, not Iruma. W-We’ve been playing a rigged game from the start. S-Since she gets to bend the t-truth then so do I-”

“I haven’t bent the truth,” Tsumugi groans. “I just...made sure that Iruma was successful, that’s all.”

“Akamatsu, what are you on about?” Rantaro asks, lowering his voice to barely above a whisper. “What do you mean that...that...”

Kaede lets out a frustrated sound when Rantaro looks at the broken tablet on the floor. “Ignore it, Amami! T-That’s not important right now-”

“Of course it’s important,” Tsumugi sighs. “Like, it’s literally against the rules to break your tablet so he’s got to be punished to make up for breaking a rule.”

“H-He didn’t break the tablet! You did!” Kaede snaps. “I-I watched you break it! This is murder if anything else-”

“I don’t know, this seems more like another very grey area,” Tsumugi says before letting out a low hum. “And Monokuma wouldn’t kill me so close to the end of the game so...”

Angie opens her mouth to say something but is quickly spoken over by Kaede. “Don’t act like you’re safe because you’re not-”

“Oh, I am aware of that,” Tsumugi responds calmly. “Because all stories end the same. The hero defeats the villain and the villain gets punished, right? But if we’re, like, going to do things properly then did you know that there’s a first come first served rule when it comes to killing in this game? If there’s more than two victims then the first victim only matters.”

Kaede narrows her eyes. “What are you getting at-”

“When Monokuma finally arrives you’re going to argue with him about Ouma's death, right?” Tsumugi clasps her hands down by her waist. “And he’s literally the first victim of the entire game. So since you’re blaming me for his death then you’re saying that he’s my first victim, right?”

“And?”

“I’m just saying that Monokuma isn’t going to punish me over breaking Amami’s tablet,” Tsumugi says. “Because, well, he’ll be considered my second, no, *third* victim if you’re going to reopen Ouma’s case.”

Kaede freezes. “T-That’s not fair!”

“I mean, it sort of is,” Tsumugi says. “I told you that Monokuma and I follow the rules very seriously. I mean, I guess I do feel bad since you never got to find out about the double murder rule but, well, that’s just bad luck-”

“You’ve been purposefully hiding things from us and bending the rules to progress the game,” Rantaro argues. “Why the hell would we agree to even play anymore?”

“I think you all have a moral obligation to at least discuss the truth about Ouma’s death,” Tsumugi answers. “And if you do just this one class trial with me then you guys win. The game ends with my death-”

“So what’s stopping us from killing you right now?” Kaede asks, pulling herself up from her bed. “Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t kill you.”

Tsumugi stares at her before giggling. “I suppose I don’t have a good reason when it comes to you. I honestly didn’t expect you to actually cut yourself whilst investigating. Hopefully you’ll last long enough to get through the class trial but-”

“Akamatsu, that’s enough,” Rantaro warns her, grabbing her upper arm to stop her from getting any closer to the cosplayer. “She’d be delighted if you stoop down to her level. Murder is never the right choice.”

“Gonta no want Akamatsu to kill either,” Gonta admits. “Gonta...Gonta no understand why Shirogane wants this game but if she says game will end if we talk then we should just talk. That way no one has to die.”

“Did you not hear the part where I said I would...” Tsumugi shakes her head. “No, never mind. Maybe you should listen to Gonta, Akamatsu. He’s right, this game will end if you just have one simple discussion with me. Isn’t that what you want?”

“I-I want you to pay for what you’ve done,” Kaede argues. “For treating us all like toys that can be disposed of once you’re bored of them. We’re people! W-We have feelings! A-And you’ve just been happily watching us all get to know each other, knowing what’s a-actually going to happen to us.”

Tsumugi yawns. She has the audacity to yawn. “*And?*”

Red seeps into Kaede’s vision. “And? That’s all you’ve got to say-”

“Akamatsu, I meant it when I said that’s enough,” Rantaro says, pulling her back. “You’re going to accomplish nothing arguing with her right now and you’re not fit enough to waste your energy on her.”

“He’s right,” Tsumugi agrees. “So be a good little pianist and sit down and wait. Monokuma is going to be here momentarily and once he arrives, he’s going to punish Amami for not keeping his tablet safe and then we’re going to have a class trial.”

“Don’t talk to me like that,” Kaede grumbles, begrudgingly sitting back down on her bed. She’s freezing. She wraps her arms around herself tightly as she shudders, blinking when Rantaro also drapes his arm over her shoulders and pulls her close.

“Everything is going to be okay, Akamatsu,” Rantaro reassures her uneasily. “I’m not sure how but...”

“How can you say that?” Kaede asks with a frown. “Everything bad that could’ve happened has. I-I’m dying and y-you’re going to die too-”

“Shut up!” Kaito’s loud shout makes Kaede jump and if it wasn’t for Rantaro’s hand on her shoulder then she’d be on the floor. “All this complaining and giving up...it’s really starting to piss me off!”

“Oh, so you didn’t break,” Tsumugi says with an amused smile. “Did you need to reboot your brain or something because you were pretty quiet for a while-”

“And you can shut up too!” Kaito adds, thrusting his finger at her. “What...what are you trying to accomplish?! You seriously didn’t actually agree to partner up with Monokuma, right?”

“I don’t think I’ve ever met someone as dense as you,” Tsumugi says. “Even Gonta knows I’m the bad guy and he’s really stupid!”

“Hey! There’s no need to say cruel things like that,” Rantaro scolds her as Gonta blinks back tears.

“I just refuse to believe that someone can be so malicious!” Kaito presses as his face turns a strange

shade of purple. “You’ve helped me a lot during this game and you can’t expect me to believe that your kindness towards me was nothing but a lie-”

“But it was, plain and simple,” Tsumugi sighs. “So-”

“Just tell me who the hell you are.” Kaito’s face scrunches up.

“...are you seriously that stupid?” Tsumugi’s eyes darken as she adjusts her glasses. “Of course I’m not Maki Harukawa and I’m certainly not an assassin. You’re so desperate to forget about your own problems that you’ll latch onto anyone who you think is struggling. I bet as soon as you heard me say I was an assassin you were ecstatic-”

“I-I don’t want people to struggle!” Kaito stares at her incredulously. “I want to fucking *help* people become the best version of who they can be! I don’t get what’s wrong with you but-”

“Oh, oh no, oh no, no, no, no,” Tsumugi chuckles, barely holding back a laugh. “You’re seriously not about to suggest that I can be *redeemed*, right? Oh, Momota, even you must know that you’re not that naïve! Look around you! Everything is a mess and I’m the only person who is having fun!”

Kaito clenches and unclenches his fist. “Quit screwing around, Ma...Shirogane. What the hell has Monokuma offered you to make you act this way?”

“Monokuma hasn’t offered me anything,” Tsumugi says. “Because I want this game just as much as him. Now I just want it finished because, well, this game plainly wasn’t supposed to happen.”

“What the hell are you-”

“Gonta thinks this is enough!” Gonta cries out abruptly. “Gonta really, really not know what going on but he hates seeing his friends argue with each other! Gonta not understand why Shirogane set up game but if Shirogane says she’ll end it if we just talk then please stop arguing! There no time to argue either because Akamatsu sick!”

“Ah...” Tsumugi bashfully scratches her cheek. “You’re right, Gonta. There really isn’t any time to argue, is there? How about we save everything else for the class trial, hmm?”

“Because there isn’t going to be a class trial,” Kaede decides. “If we have a class trial then that means reopening O-Ouma’s case and accepting that he’s Shirogane’s first victim. If...If we...”

“Um, doing the class trial is the only way to end the game,” Tsumugi points out. “Because every game always ends with a confrontation between the players and the mastermind. And the class trial is going to end with my death too, meaning the killing game will end. Why on earth would you *not* want a class trial?”

“I-I’m not letting you kill Amami,” Kaede answers firmly. “That’s why.”

“Akamatsu...” Rantaro shuffles uncomfortably. “Ending the killing game is much more-”

“*No.*” Kaede’s hands clench in her lap. “Shut up, I don’t want to hear it-”

“What? Are you seriously saying you’re willing to sacrifice everyone else to save one person?” Tsumugi blinks. “You do realise that if you don’t have a class trial then I’m still going to be around? The game is going to continue and Monokuma will probably just give you all another time limit-”

"I think we're all in agreement that we'd all rather die than continue playing your game," Kaito suddenly says. "Isn't that right?"

Kaede nods. "Yeah, that's right."

"Gonta...Gonta doesn't truly want to die but if he has too so game ends then..." Gonta puts a hand to his chest. "Gonta will die with his friends."

"G-Guys..." Rantaro looks panicked. "I understand ending the game is important but..."

"Did anyone actually check to see if it was Rantaro's tablet that got broken?" Angie asks, tilting her head to the side. She's hugging her own tablet to her chest. "Because Angie-"

"Hey kids! Sorry for the wait!"

Monokuma pops up by Kaede's door.

"Finally, you're here!" Tsumugi sighs a little too dramatically. "I've been waiting ages for you!"

"Well excuse me princess," Monokuma responds with an eye roll. "Anyway, I've been listening very closely with my belly button microphone so-"

"I'm certain it was Amami's tablet that broke," Kaede answers Angie. She shakes her head bitterly. "Because I had my own tablet, S-Shirogane's and Amami's with me."

"And I already checked mine and Akamatsu's," Tsumugi adds. "So if you're trying to come up with some last minute plan to save the day then-"

Monokuma laughs behind his paws. "I think you should listen to what Angie has to say, Miss Shirogane."

"Huh?" Tsumugi licks her lips. "But I checked the tablets and I definitely destroyed Amami's-"

"Then why does Angie have Rantaro's tablet in her hands?" Angie asks.

"What?!" Tsumugi looks horrified. "Is this a joke? P-Pass it here now!"

"Angie, what are you on about?" Rantaro asks, equally perplexed. "You gave me back my tablet this morning at the table."

Angie shakes her head. "No, Angie gave you back *a* tablet. Not *your* tablet."

"...huh?" Kaede's stomach drops.

Rantaro looks at the tablet on the floor and the one in Angie's hands, shaking his head in confusion. "What? No...no, no, no. Angie, are you sure-"

"God has been telling me from the start that Shirogane was not to be trusted," Angie says. "And whilst Angie...made a mistake when she first tried to deal with Shirogane, Angie was hit with this horrible feeling when Rantaro showed us his tablet."

"Even if you felt something was wrong, why did you take his tablet?" Tsumugi asks frantically, snatching the tablet from Angie's hands. "I-I didn't even plan to break his tablet until the idea came to me! Even you couldn't have guessed that-"

"Angie has known for a very long time that you're a horrible person," Angie explains. "And Angie

hates horrible people. When Angie thought you were an assassin she thought she was doing the right thing getting rid of you but Angie...I messed up really bad. Locking myself away from everyone didn't feel like enough so when A...I got this horrible feeling when holding Rantaro's tablet..."

"Y-You knew that Shirogane killed Kiibo too," Kaede says. "Were you worried that Shirogane would go after Amami f-for showing us his tablet?"

"You did what?!" Kaito's eyes go wide as he gives Tsumugi a disbelieving look. "You killed Kiibo?"

"I'd hardly count Kiibo being dismantled the same as murdering him," Tsumugi mutters. "He can easily be put back together. However, for the sake of the game we just classed what happened to him as a murder to make you all feel sadder."

Angie glares at her. "Even so, Angie watched you from her room break Kiibo. When Shirogane got away with doing such a thing...Angie knew she couldn't be trusted. Rantaro said that his tablet was really, really important so God told Angie that she should look after it for a while, until Shirogane revealed her true identity."

"This has to be a joke," Tsumugi mutters, running a hand through her hair. "No one's going to care if *Angie* gets punished right before the end of the game! M-Monokuma, let's just pretend that it's Amami's tablet. We can just edit the footage-"

"Shirogane wrong about no one caring!" Gonta frowns. "Gonta cares! Shirogane should not say things that are not true!"

"What? She caused Chabashira and Tojo to die-"

"No, Angie did not! *You* did!" Gonta argues tearfully. "Angie only tried to kill because Shirogane make us play this game! She could've asked Monokuma to stop game for so long now but hasn't!"

"Geez," Tsumugi murmurs, rubbing her forehead. "What a pain."

"Angie..." Rantaro looks like he's on the verge of tears himself. "You..."

"Angie did not purposefully save Rantaro," Angie admits with a sad smile. "But life is mysterious. Maybe it was fate that Angie decided to swap her tablet with yours. At least now Angie can truly repent for all the pain she's caused."

"B-But you shouldn't have to die because of Shirogane," Kaede argues weakly. "A-Angie, fight back! P-Please-"

"Angie is giving everyone a reason to go stop the killing game," Angie says. "Because Shirogane is right, Angie will not be missed here and she's sure her island will understand. After all, Angie knows she is no longer fit to lead her island any longer..."

Gonta shakes his head. "No, Angie wrong! Angie still a part of group!"

"And I'm not letting Monokuma kill you without a fight either," Kaito adds, curling his hand into a fist. "You can't punish her for someone else breaking her tablet!"

"Angie is responsible for her own tablet," Monokuma states. "It doesn't matter if a student purposefully breaks another student's tablet. I'll admit, it's a bit of a grey area but-"

“You’re just protecting the mastermind! Admit it!” Kaito shouts, taking an angry step forward. “If anyone else here had broken it then you would’ve forced us to figure out who did! This is bullshit and you know it!”

“Everyone, that’s enough,” Angie says quietly.

However, she’s not loud enough to stop Gonta and Kaito to furiously stand in front of the artist with clenched fists. She waves her hands frantically.

“A-Angie really thinks that-”

“Oh my God...” Tsumugi pinches her nose. “Guys, does anyone seriously not get the urgency of the situation? Hello? Akamatsu’s going to die soon so we really need to get started with the class trial-”

“Then have your stupid class trial,” Kaito barks back.

Tsumugi pulls a face. “But I need everyone-”

“Gonta not moving until Monokuma promises not to hurt Angie!” Gonta insists, standing his ground. “Gonta really sorry Akamatsu but maybe you can do trial without Gonta-”

“All students must attend a class trial when they are in session!” Monokuma’s shrill voice bounces around the dormitories. “Quite frankly I’ve had enough of this nonsense! Either you all get a move on or I’m punishing everyone!”

“But-” Tsumugi is instantly cut off.

“When I said everyone I mean everyone,” Monokuma warns her, his red eye flashing dangerously. “Pulling a stunt like breaking Angie’s tablet without my permission was very silly of you. I couldn’t care less if there’s three people or one hundred people in a class trial. Just because you’re desperate to stick to your original script doesn’t mean you have to create messes that I have to clean up.”

Tsumugi scowls at him. “I just want one thing to go right! I’ve fought hard to get here and to have my game ruined because three students didn’t bother to turn up-”

“Don’t care, didn’t ask.” Monokuma sighs. “Don’t you think I’m disappointed too? I’ve always said that class trials are my favourite part of a game. But now I have to waste even more time to punish a student you decided to get out of the way for what? No reason? You’re the worst mastermind I’ve ever had to work with!”

“Whatever,” Tsumugi grumbles, clutching her arm. “Anyway, I might as well ask on the behalf of everyone else that we’d like to reopen Ouma’s murder case again. Well, discuss his death in more detail anyway since some new evidence has come to light.”

“We don’t want a class trial,” Kaede insists firmly. “We’re all done with this game.”

“And Gonta not moving until Angie is safe,” Gonta adds. “So Gonta is gonna fight! Fight to stop Monokuma and end game!”

“See! You’ve caused pointless hassle!” Monokuma grumbles. “To run a successful killing game you have to scare them into playing! Not bully them!”

“Well it’s not my fault everyone here has a death wish!” Tsumugi argues. “C’mon, guys! I’ve

already promised that the game will stop if you just do one thing for me!”

Rantaro shuffles nervously. “How can we even trust you? The rules state that the game is going to continue until there’s two people left so how do we not know that you’re going to trick us one more time if we do have a class trial?”

Tsumugi grasps the air in frustration. “That’s...I...ugh, Monokuma, please can you just do something?”

“Why? I find this situation quite amusing,” Monokuma admits, smirking when Tsumugi gives him an exasperated stare. “Fine, fine. Rules are rules, I guess. Geez, I can’t believe someone managed to break a rule even when I was being extra lenient with them!”

“Angie did not break rule!” Gonta responds. “Because Angie did not break tablet! Shirogane did!”

“Rule ten states that the Monopads are important items and that they are not to be damaged,” Monokuma says. “Angie’s tablet is clearly broken and that violates this rule. I’ve made it very clear from the start that students who break a rule will be punished accordingly.”

“Is being punished different to being...killed by you for committing murder?” Rantaro asks.

“I mean it’s not as extravagant,” Monokuma grumbles bitterly. “If things were different then I’d ask my children to use their Exisals to turn a naughty student into a pancake. Since they’re not around...well, there’s only one thing I can do!”

Monokuma looks very pleased with himself as he pulls a remote from behind his back and plays with the switches. The ground starts to shake and through the dormitory class walls, Kaede can see several machines charging towards her bedroom.

“Good thing I found this remote lying around!” Monokuma reveals. “I didn’t even know the Exisals came with a remote but it’s certainly come in handy! Now, it would make things a lot easier if you all head outside so I can-”

“We’re not moving!” Kaito grits his teeth. “None of us are! Why the hell should we play a game that’s been rigged against us from the start?! You can’t expect us to follow the rules but bend them when you run into a problem!”

“I have not bent any rules!” Monokuma angrily argues. “How dare you suggest otherwise! Now move aside, otherwise I’ll punish you too!”

“Then do it!” Kaito challenges. “As far as I’m concerned I’m not playing this game anymore. I quit!”

“You can’t quit! That’s not how it works!” Monokuma fiddles with his remote. “The only way to leave the game is to graduate and to do that you need to participate in a class trial!”

“Gonta no do class trial if it means sending Shirogane to her death,” Gonta retorts as he gets ready to fight. “Gonta know Shirogane bad for setting up game but she person too! Gonta not ever forgive her for this game but he not going to let her die either. If Gonta have to skip class trial then Gonta will.”

“Seriously?” Monokuma tilts his head to the side. “Are you guys seriously about to make me punish three people in one go? As exciting as that does sound-”

“No! I-I’m getting my class trial!” Tsumugi dashes in front of Gonta and Kaito with her arms

stretched wide. “I didn’t work so hard just to let things crumble now! Why are you both trying to throw your lives away? Both of you dying here isn’t going to make a difference at all! So-”

“I always fight for what I believe in,” Kaito says and narrows his eyes. “And to let you and Monokuma kill an innocent person is something I refuse to let happen. I’d rather die trying to protect someone worth believing in then stoop down to your level.”

“B-But Angie doesn’t want that!” Angie’s lip wobbles. “Why isn’t anyone listening to what Angie wants?! Angie doesn’t want people dying for her again!”

“I’m giving you all ten seconds to get out or I’m bringing the Exisals inside,” Monokuma threatens, his paw hovering over his remote. “Believe me, I’ll have no problem killing every last one of you if I have to.”

“Seriously! Can you all just go outside?!” Tsumugi puts a hand on her chest as she cries out in distress. “The game can’t end like this! W-What if I let Angie live? If I let her join the class trial then-”

“Rules are rules, Shirogane,” Monokuma says. “This can end in either two ways. You all go outside and Angie gets punished or you all stay here and I punish you all. It’s simple really.”

“Or there’s the third option,” Kaito growls. “Where I kick your ass and no one has to die!”

“Rule eight, violence towards the headmaster is strictly prohibited,” Monokuma fires back. “Since I’m feeling generous I’ll ignore your little outburst but if you get any closer to me then I’ll be forced to punish you too!”

“For someone who has let the game continue because of a lie, I-I don’t get why you’re preaching about the rules s-so much,” Kaede mutters. “Y-You can’t get to decide when you want to follow the rules and when you d-don’t.”

Monokuma groans loudly. “Seriously, Shirogane. Couldn’t you have waited until the class trial to reveal your status as the mastermind? I usually don’t mind it when students act defiant but this is just too much!”

Tsumugi rolls her eyes. “Then do something about it then.”

“Very well then.” Monokuma clears his throat. “Get out or I’ll remove every single one of you forcefully and I can’t promise I’ll be gentle.”

Tsumugi looks annoyingly smug when most of them pull an uncomfortable face at this. “You know, it’s easy to go on and on about how you’d all rather die than play along but the truth is none of you know how you’re going to react when you come face to face with death. Look at you all, you’re all trembling!”

“That’s because I’m pissed off!” Kaito insists but chews on his bottom lip a little too hard.

“Akamatsu, this is enough now,” Rantaro nudges her carefully. “I’m sorry that things have come to this but...this isn’t going to solve anything. What if no one knows where we are? If we die here and we’re not found...our families would be devastated.”

“Yeah, Akamatsu, stop being selfish,” Tsumugi adds. “Just because *you’re* going to die soon doesn’t mean everyone else has too.”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Rantaro snaps. “Can you do everyone a favour and just keep your

mouth shut? The more you speak the more unlikeable you become.”

“Hah! As if I care about that!” Tsumugi smiles as she turns around, her hair bouncing along with her movement. “I’m going outside. Either you can all follow me or all stay here and die. Waste your lives for all I care.”

Tsumugi pushes open the glass door and heads outside. She heads to the Exisals and waits patiently behind them, clasping her hands together down by her waist. She’s acting frustratingly calm, as if she knows that at least one person is going to crack.

“Anyone else?” Monokuma asks. “If just one more person walks out of here then that’ll be it, you know? Forget the class trial, this game will be over. I know some of you are very stupid but I know none of you are stupid enough to actually die for no reason, right?”

Everyone looks at each other with the same level of uncertainty. Kaede wonders if things were different then would people be fighting right now to leave? No one is moving despite Monokuma’s words.

“How about this? Try and think of the bigger picture,” Monokuma says. “If you all die here then what’s to stop Shirogane and I from hosting another game? We’ll just replace everyone and pretend like this game never even happened. You’ll all die forgotten and I can promise you all that your deaths will not mean a single thing.”

Kaede freezes before glaring at the bear. “You...”

“You’re all replaceable,” Monokuma continues. “This little showdown means nothing to me. If you all want to die now then fine. This defiant act that you’re all doing means absolutely nothing.”

Whilst Tsumugi’s words felt like a blow to the stomach, Monokuma’s felt like he was going straight for the neck. Kaede chews her lip furiously as she struggles to fight away the dark splotches appearing in her vision.

“...I’m going to the class trial.”

“A-Amami?” Kaede blinks as Rantaro turns his head to the side.

“As frustrating as it is, Monokuma has a point,” Rantaro explains. “This game isn’t about us anymore. If we have the chance to stop Shirogane then we should take it. I know that she wants this class trial but...it makes me feel sick that other people might be forced to play this game against their own free will.”

Kaito’s hand trembles. “...damn it.”

“Then friends go to class trial to stop Shirogane and Gonta stay here to stop Monokuma!” Gonta decides. “Because Angie does not deserve to die! Gonta will fight because Gonta promised himself that he’d keep all his friends safe!”

“But Angie does not want that!” Angie grabs Gonta’s wrist. “Angie has already accepted that-”

“Angie should not have to accept anything because only Shirogane is responsible for Angie’s tablet breaking! Shirogane broke rule, not Angie!” Gonta says. “Gonta knows he stupid but even Gonta can understand that Angie is not in the wrong! Monokuma is breaking his own rules and-”

“Geez, how many times am I going to hear this argument?” Monokuma sighs loudly. “Either you all leave right now or I’m crushing every single one of you!”

Kaede jumps when Rantaro rests her arm around his shoulders and stands up. Her legs tremble and she can't feel her feet. She puts a hand on his chest to steady herself and looks up at him uncertainly. "Amami, what are you doing?"

"I'm sorry but I'm not letting you die here," Rantaro answers. "Please don't fight me."

The room spins slightly as they both take a step forward. Kaede's glad that she can still move but she's certain that the poison is attacking her at full force now. She doubts that she's going to last anymore than a couple of hours at this point.

A part of her wants to demand him to stop and leave her here. She's exhausted and she doesn't want to give Tsumugi the satisfaction of participating in her class trial she so desperately wants. However, another part is desperate to let Tsumugi get what she deserves. Kaede wonders if she's a bad person for thinking these thoughts.

At the very start of the game she had prepared herself to kill the mastermind and now that she finally has the chance...why is she hesitating? She should be grateful that she's finally got the chance to punish the person responsible for so many deaths.

Rantaro stops next to Kaito and gives him an expectant look. "Momota?"

"I..." Kaito looks uncharacteristically conflicted. "I don't-"

"Momota go and support everyone else!" Gonta insists. "Momota been ill recently so he might get hurt if he stays here! Don't worry about Gonta, Gonta will fight with everything he has!"

"But Angie doesn't want that!" Angie begs. "Angie doesn't understand why Gonta won't leave!"

"Because Angie is Gonta's friend and shouldn't be alone in situation like this," Gonta says and his words cause Kaede to have a sobering realisation. Even someone like Gonta knows that he won't win against five huge machines. "Gonta know Angie hates herself but no one ever should die sad and alone. Gonta knows that he won't be helpful at all at class trial because Gonta not very smart so Gonta's place is to stay here with Angie and rely on other friends to stop killing games for good!"

Angie gapes at him. "But..."

"Angie," Rantaro says softly. "You deserve so much better than what you think you do. I'm so sorry that this is happening to you. Shirogane only broke the tablet because she thought it was mine-"

"Angie is glad that this is how things turned out," Angie admits quietly, fumbling with her coat sleeves. "...when Shirogane said earlier that we don't know how we'd react when faced with death she was right. Angie...Angie truly thought she was untouchable when she got here but when people died because of her...Angie had never felt so lost."

Kaede looks at the floor as her eyes start to sting.

"Angie is sorry for killing Chabashira and causing Tojo to die," Angie says softly. "But Angie is not sorry for trying to keep everyone safe. If Angie had it her way then she would've turned this school into a paradise for us all to live in together happily. Unfortunately, God has decided that it's her time to go now and Angie can hear him calling."

Rantaro bites his lip before reaching out a hand and ruffling Angie's hair, much to the artist's surprise. The way he carefully messes her hair up reminds Kaede of...a big brother caring for a

little sister.

“Angie?” Kaede says quietly and the artist turns to face Kaede curiously. “I...I’m sorry...”

“But Kaede has nothing to apologise for?” Angie blinks.

“Of course I-I do,” Kaede says before coughing harshly. “Ah...”

“C’mon, Kaede, let’s get you out of here,” Kaito says and Kaede yelps when her free arm is suddenly slung around Kaito’s shoulders.

“H-Hey-”

Kaito’s face switches through a couple of emotions before he grins. “You both give Monokuma hell, okay? We’ll stop Shirogane!”

“Momota going with everyone else?” Gonta asks. “Ah, that relief! Gonta really worried Momota was going to get hurt if he stayed here!”

“As much as this entire situation pisses me off, there’s no way I’m letting Shirogane get away with hurting so many people!” Kaito adjusts Kaede’s arm carefully. “And my sidekick still needs me so-”

“Ugh, can you all stop talking?” Monokuma complains. “Seriously, all this emotional talk is making me sick and I can’t even get sick! C’mon, chop chop! The door is right there!”

“Angie really thinks Gonta should go with everyone else,” Angie pleads as she turns to face Gonta. “Gonta does not owe Angie anything-”

“Gonta has made his choice and,” Gonta smiles, “Gonta stay here with Angie so...we face end together.”

Kaede barely manages to keep her face from falling as Kaito and Rantaro walk her away from the dormitories and outside. The blast of fresh air doesn’t even help her much. The mixture of leaving two friends behind and the poison in her veins is becoming a little too much.

“Only three of you?” Tsumugi pouts as the trio get closer to her. “...ugh, I guess that-”

“Shut up,” Rantaro snaps roughly. “Are you happy now?”

“Not really,” Tsumugi admits with a muffled voice, turning her head to the side. Her hair curtains her face. “...Akamatsu looks like she’s about to keel over at any moment. Monokuma might take a while so we might as well wait for him at the trial room. Follow me.”

She walks away a little too quickly. Kaede glares at her back as both Rantaro and Kaito hold her up right, following Tsumugi very slowly. Behind her, Kaede hears the Exisals start up and she struggles to swallow the thick lump in her throat that suddenly appears.

The pianist notices Tsumugi roll her eyes as she waits for the trio by a red door which she surprisingly holds open for everyone. She leads them to a fountain and fiddles around with the Monokuma statue. It explodes suddenly and a bridge appears as well as an elevator.

The trip down is tense. Tsumugi stands by the doors almost eagerly, humming to herself as Kaede, Rantaro and Kaito stand at the back of the elevator.

“Hey...have you seriously enjoyed putting us through this game?” Kaito asks as the elevator nears

its destination.

Tsumugi's shoulders slump as she sighs. "Save any questions for the trial."

"Well I'm asking you now," Kaito retorts. "Because I...I can't believe someone can enjoy putting people through a hellish game like this."

"You can't believe everyone is a good person, you know," Tsumugi murmurs, clearing her throat when the elevator doors slide open. "Ah, here we are!"

The trial room has sixteen podiums inside, eleven of which have a photograph on them. Kaede shudders when she reaches her own podium, staring at the photograph of herself. There's an ugly red cross covering her face. She knocks the photograph to the floor, not caring to even think why it's there in the first place.

"Do you want me to stay with you?" Rantaro asks as Kaede clutches the sides of her podium tightly.

She shakes her head. "I'll be fine, the sooner we get this over and done with the better."

Rantaro looks uncertain before giving her a small nod, heading over to his own podium and placing his photograph on the floor.

Kaito pulls a face at his portrait. "What the hell is this?"

"I plainly don't know," Tsumugi says, giving the room a confused look. "These portraits...shouldn't be here. A portrait only goes up if the owner of the podium dies."

"You don't have a picture but we all do," Kaito points out. "Want to explain that?"

Tsumugi stares at him blankly. "I can't."

Kaede grits her teeth as she readjusts her grip on her podium. "Momota, drop it. T-There's not enough time to...ask pointless questions. A-All that matters is...stopping the killing game, right?"

"That's right," Tsumugi agrees. "As soon as Monokuma arrives we can begin."

"We have to wait for Monokuma?" Rantaro blinks. "But--"

"He'll act as the judge during the class trial. The trial can't start or end without him," Tsumugi explains. "Please be patient for just a little longer."

"I don't have just a little longer," Kaede grits out. She can feel beads of sweat run down her face. "W-We're starting now regardless of whether he's here or not b-because he already knows what's up. All we have to do is c-confirm that you're Ouma's killer, right?"

"...basically," Tsumugi answers. "But--"

"Then let's cut all of the bullshit and get straight to the point," Kaede says before swallowing. "Y-You're Ouma's actual killer, correct?"

Tsumugi rolls her eyes. "Obviously. There's no point trying to deny it now."

Kaito stares at her in shock. "Are you not even going to try and deny it? What the hell is wrong with you?"

“Even if I did try to convince you all that I’m not Ouma’s killer, well, it would just be a waste of time,” Tsumugi responds as she checks her fingernails. “The only reason that we’re having this class trial is to end the game anyway.”

“But why do you want to end the game?” Rantaro asks. “That doesn’t make any sense.”

“I’m bored,” Tsumugi answers. “This game was never supposed to happen and at first I thought it would be fun to see how it would play out but it’s obvious I should’ve just stopped the game from the get go.”

Kaede’s fist clenches tightly. “Y-You’re horrible, you know that?”

“Oh, I’m very much aware,” Tsumugi says.

“Sorry, but I don’t think I understand what’s going on here,” Rantaro says with a frown.

“Shirogane, you said this game was never meant to happen. Do you care to elaborate?”

“I mean...” Tsumugi looks up at the ceiling with a thoughtful expression on her face. “There’s no point getting into the finer details but, well, how do I put this without causing even more hassle...”

“Don’t you think we all deserve to know the truth about what’s going on?” Kaito asks, slamming his hand down onto his podium. “Enough with the secrets!”

“Oh, it’s not that I want to hide things from you. It’s more so I’m worried how you’ll all react if I tell you the actual truth behind the killing game,” Tsumugi explains. “Don’t get me wrong, watching people crumble when they find out a horrible truth is really fun to watch but unfortunately I don’t think we have the time for that considering that Akamatsu looks like she’s about to drop dead any second.”

“If you’re just trying to scare us away from finding out the truth about why you set up this game then it’s not going to work,” Kaede says. “You’re just wasting time saying otherwise.”

Tsumugi expression softens. “Oh Akamatsu, you’re painfully wrong. I know a lot more about you all than you’ll ever realise. No, as much as I do want to reveal the truth on you all...well, ending this game so I can restart it is much more important.”

“...what do you mean by restarting the game?” Rantaro asks. “If you haven’t noticed, everyone but us is dead. Unless you’re planning on forcing more innocent people into playing your game then-”

“Oh no, there’s no need for that,” Tsumugi says as she taps her cheek. “I mean, this is kind of an anticlimactic reveal but, well, let me ask you all a question. How do you think Monokuma has been able to do and offer the impossible?”

“Well...” Kaito puts a fist to his hip. “He must have some sort of powers? Like super alien powers or something?”

Tsumugi rolls her eyes. “Are you a child?”

“There’s no logical explanation as to why Monokuma has been able to do some things,” Rantaro answers, crossing his arms. “The most impossible thing he’s done is transport Tojo during her punishment. We all saw with our own eyes her teleport into a completely different room with no explanation.”

“W-Was it a trick or something?” Kaede asks. “Or a...h-hallucination?”

“Hmm, not exactly,” Tsumugi says. “To put it plainly, we’re all in a simulation. Surprise! That’s just a small part of the truth behind the killing game!”

“...of course,” Rantaro murmurs as his eyes go wide. “Why didn’t I think of that? It...It would explain so much-”

“Hey, if we’re in a simulation then none of this is real, right?” Kaito asks. “Does that mean that...everyone who has died...are they...”

“They’re not *actually* dead,” Tsumugi answers, pulling a face. “Of course if the situation was different then I wouldn’t be telling any of you any of this. It completely ruins the immersion of the killing game once you know that nothing is actually real.”

Kaede stares at her. “...we get to see everyone again?”

“Oh my God...” Tsumugi scrunches her face up. “Yes, you’ll be able to see everyone again once we all wake up. We just need to end the game and to do that we need to get down to two survivors.”

“You said the game would end when you die,” Rantaro says in an accusatory tone.

“I was trying to give you all a reason to do the trial,” Tsumugi mutters. “Okay, sure, my bad that I lied but it’s not going to matter soon anyway.”

“Of course it matters!” Kaede glares at her. “I-It doesn’t matter that a-all this is a simulation! T-That doesn’t change the fact that you forced us to p-play a game you didn’t even want! How sick do you have to be to force a game that was never meant to happen?!”

“Oh geez...” Tsumugi grimaces. “Do you really think now is the best time to scold me? To be plainly honest, I really don’t care what you think about me. If you’re going to waste your breath then at least waste it on finishing the class trial. As much as you’ve accused Monokuma and I of bending the rules, we’re still very serious about following them. And to end the game-”

“We need to do the class trial, you’ve already said,” Kaito says with a frown. “And don’t talk to Kaede like that! What right do you have to insult her when you’ve been working with Monokuma all this time to make us play this game! What the fuck, Shirogane?”

“What? Are you not going to give me some pep talk about how I’m better than this?” Tsumugi asks as she covers her mouth to hold back a giggle. “Am I not one of your little sidekicks anymore?”

Kaito’s face turns red. “Only people worth believing in can be a sidekick of mine. And you? You’re nothing but a joke.”

“Ouch, that’s kind of harsh,” Tsumugi says. “Who gave you the right to decide who is a good and bad person anyway?”

“Anyone with a brain can tell you’re certainly not a good person,” Rantaro responds. “Even little kids know that murder is bad yet you’re hosting a game that encourages it. You can’t get any lower than that.”

Tsumugi snorts. “Yet you all ended up playing the game. None of you had to kill, you know? Of course it was encouraged but neither Monokuma nor I forced you to actually hurt each other.”

“The first motive was literally a fucking time limit!” Kaito shouts.

“Which you all could’ve ignored!” Tsumugi fires back. “Wasn’t it you who said before that everyone would rather die than continue to play the game yet here you all are!”

“We’re here to stop y-you, not continue the game,” Kaede argues. “So don’t try to t-twist our actions.”

“I’m just saying,” Tsumugi responds with an irritating smile. “You’re all preaching at me about how I’m the worst person ever and sure, maybe I killed a few people but I didn’t cause every death here! What about people like Tojo and Hoshi? Are you going to defend them but not me?”

“They would never have killed if they hadn’t been put into this game,” Kaito snaps. “And you know it. Tojo put Chabashira out of her misery whilst Hoshi was trying to look out for Kaede! Shinguji’s death was an accident!”

“And Iruma?”

“You scared her into killing!” Kaede yells at her. “A-And in the end she didn’t even kill Ouma! Y-You did! She left this game thinking she was a murderer! S-She must feel awful!”

“Every single one of you here had the choice of deciding whether to kill or not and that’s the truth,” Tsumugi says. “Blame me for everyone’s deaths for all I care. I may be responsible for the killing game but I didn’t make a single one of you kill-”

“No, that’s wrong,” Rantaro objects.

“Oh? Is that so?” Tsumugi smiles. “Tell me, how am I wrong?”

“Earlier you mentioned that this game was never meant to happen,” Rantaro says, narrowing his eyes. “And you claimed you only let it play out because you were curious to see what would happen.”

“And?”

“Your words imply that you expected the game to play out a different way. My guess is that if the three graduated students were here then things would be a lot different now,” Rantaro continues. “You’re desperate to end this game and start up a new one but I have a feeling that it’s not any game you want to start up but a game you know the outcome of.”

Tsumugi blinks before letting out a sharp laugh. “And this is why if I had things my way, you would’ve died a very long time ago.”

“He’s right?” Kaito staggers backwards. “But...”

“Since we’re in a simulation I can influence the game as much as I want,” Tsumugi says. “And Amami is right, I want this game over so I can finally play my game! This game was nothing but a glitch. An interesting glitch but one that needs to end now.”

“...then that j-just makes you an even worse person!” Kaede puts a hand to her stomach as a bead of sweat drips down her face. “What actually is your problem, Shirogane? Why the hell would you want to play a game i-if you know how it ends?!”

“I actually don’t know how my game ends,” Tsumugi corrects her. “The first five trials are scripted and I let whatever happens happen during the sixth. As long as the game ends with two survivors then I couldn’t care less what happens.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Kaito says. “What matters is that you think it’s okay to put people through games like these! It doesn’t fucking matter if we’re in a simulation or not! The torture you’re putting people through is real! What we’re fucking feeling right now is real!”

“Ugh, could you be more cliché?” Tsumugi groans. “Blah, blah, blah, people have feelings and I’m such a nasty person for making people sad. Momota, I literally don’t care.”

“W-What’s to stop us f-from refusing to play again once t-this game finishes?” Kaede asks, gritting her teeth. “Like hell am I-I letting you put me o-or anyone else through a game like this again!”

“I mean, none of you are going to remember this game once the new game starts,” Tsumugi says. “There’s plenty of people who are helping out behind the scenes. None of us are actually going to wake up when this game finishes, you know? What’s most likely going to happen is that we’re all going to wake up here in this school with no memory of this game at all.”

“That’s a lie!” Kaito argues but fails to hide the uncertain look on his face. “Don’t you agree, Kaede?”

“I…” Kaede wipes her forehead. “I…”

“I think she’s actually right,” Rantaro says.

“What? You do?” Tsumugi blinks before smiling. “Yes! Of course you do! But, um, why?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Rantaro asks. “It’s clear we’ve all been here before. This isn’t our first killing game.”

“Yes it is,” Tsumugi says. “This game is just a glitch, remember?”

Rantaro shakes his head. “Whilst there is a glitch, the game isn’t glitching the way you think it is. It’s not that the three graduated students didn’t load in, it’s that we didn’t wake up after the last killing game.”

“Huh?” Tsumugi wrings her hands together. “B-But-”

“I’m presuming that when you die, you’re supposed to wake up from the simulation, right?” Rantaro asks, grimacing when Tsumugi nods her head. “And I’m also presuming that the other way to wake up from the simulation is to win the game. There’s evidence that we’ve been here before-”

“N-No, every inconsistency here is because of the glitches I’ve been on about!” Tsumugi insists. “Because the school wasn’t meant to be built when we woke up and the tablets weren’t supposed to have the rules on them yet.”

“Yet the school was complete and we saw the rules as soon as we woke up,” Rantaro says. “Furthermore, we’re lucky enough that Ouma had been taking notes during the previous game and had a whiteboard explaining who had been killed by who. Shirogane, am I right in saying that in your game, I was the first victim and Akamatsu the first killer?”

“Y-Yeah but-”

“Was Hoshi the second victim and Tojo the second killer? And did you plan for Shinguji to kill both Angie and Chabashira-”

"I-I don't understand what you're getting at!" Tsumugi cries.

"You did have your killing game," Rantaro says. "You just don't remember it because you must've died."

"Monokuma did put you on the whiteboard outside," Kaito says. "Does that mean Monokuma is aware of the glitch?"

"I was supposed to die at the end of my game," Tsumugi reveals suddenly, her face turning pale. "I know I said I didn't plan the sixth trial of my game but I knew I was supposed to die. I-I was supposed to convince two more people to die along with me but..."

"Somehow three people survived your game," Rantaro says. "Saihara, Harukawa and Yumeno. The three graduated students."

"I don't know...I don't know how that happened," Tsumugi admits. "O-Only two people can survive. Was there another glitch perhaps?"

"I think we would've gotten an answer if we got to listen to the entirety of Kiibo's audio," Rantaro tells her. "Since it's most likely he ended up killing you at the end of the previous game."

"B-But how did M-Monokuma know that?" Kaede asks. "H-He completed the whiteboard and said Tsumugi was a victim and Kiibo a killer."

"Maybe he subconsciously remembers it happening," Rantaro explains. "Kiibo had the audio from the previous game saved but didn't remember a thing. The same thing could apply to Monokuma. From the way he's been acting I don't think he flat out remembers the previous game but a small part of him is aware that it happened."

"But..." Tsumugi stares at the floor. "Does this mean I...I don't get to remember my killing game?"

"Seriously? That's what you care about right now?" Kaede asks incredulously. "Amami has just figured o-out that we're stuck i-in some sort of glitch that's forcing the game to l-loop!"

Tsumugi bites her lip. "...ah."

"Hey, Amami? If you are right then where did the three graduates go?" Kaito asks.

Rantaro frowns. "I don't think I can answer that with certainty. It's most likely that they woke up or are at least unable to play the game anymore. However, the Monopads have acknowledged that all three of them have graduated, which confuses me."

"So the game itself has acknowledged that there's a glitch but is playing along?" Kaito asks, rubbing his chin. "This is getting confusing even for me."

"The game adapts depending on the situation," Tsumugi suddenly explains. "But it should've stopped after the first game! I-I don't understand why we've been put into another killing game! Let's just end it so-"

"Maybe we shouldn't be so hasty," Rantaro says. "Because...because we have a pretty big problem."

"A-Amami? What's wrong?" Kaede asks. She licks her lips. "You look really worried."

“That’s because...” Rantaro swallows. “If I’m right about the glitch then once this game ends then another one is going to start and whoever joins the next game isn’t going to have a clue that they’re stuck in a loop.”

“...because their memory is going to be wiped,” Kaito murmurs in realisation. “Fucking hell, Shirogane. What the fuck did you do for this to happen?”

“I-I didn’t know any of this was going to happen!” Tsumugi cries, putting a hand to her chest. “I’m in the dark just as much as you guys are!”

Rantaro shakes his head. “Guys, focus. There’s still a major issue we need to address.”

“Huh?” Kaito blinks. “God, what is wrong now?!”

“How are...we going to end this game?” Rantaro asks quietly, fiddling with a ring on his finger anxiously. “Because whoever survives this game gets to wake up presumably but...there’s four of us and there can only be two survivors.”

Kaede’s knees buckle. “...that’s...”

“The most despairing thing I’ve ever heard!”

Tsumugi’s eyes swirl as drool dribbles from her mouth. It’s difficult to tell if she’s snapped because of the information or if she’s genuinely, wholeheartedly enjoying the realisation. The cosplayer clasps her hands together as she giggles.

“Oh my! Even Junko Enoshima didn’t get to experience something like this!” Tsumugi’s body shakes along with her laughter. “I’ve been so desperate to have a game just like hers that I didn’t even think about the possibility of having a game that’s even *more* despairing! God, who cares if this killing game sucks anymore! The fact that I’m never going to get my killing game is the best despair I could ask for!”

“Who the hell is Junko Enoshima?” Kaito asks.

Tsumugi cackles as her fingers twitch. It’s almost as if she’s in her own dream world. “Forget about copying her game! I’m going to experience a new despair each loop! Enoshima got to experience a delicious despair but only once! I-I get to experience getting crushed by hope over and over and over again!”

“She’s lost it,” Kaede murmurs, eyes wide in disbelief.

“Who cares if I forget each game?” Tsumugi hugs herself tightly, her chest heaving as barely manages to conceal her excitement. “This...This is true despair!”

“Why is she so obsessed about despair?” Rantaro mutters to himself before sighing. “Anyway, it’s clear that she’s going to be no help anymore.”

“But we still have to figure out...” Kaede coughs before wincing. “Who gets to l-leave.”

“Well of course I’m not letting my sidekick go through another killing game!” Kaito suddenly declares, knocking his fists together.

Kaede snaps her head over into his direction. “But-”

“And...and what sort of hero would I be if I abandon everyone now to leave?” Kaito continues.

“Amami, you leave with Kaede and look after her!”

“But I don’t want to abandon everyone else either,” Rantaro says quickly. “Momota, you deserve to leave as much as I do. You’ve helped everyone during this game whilst I’ve just caused problems-”

“I don’t know what problems you’ve caused but you can’t grow from them if you join another game and forget everything,” Kaito says. “Besides, you’re the only person I can trust to keep my sidekick safe! I’m not letting her leave this game alone!”

“But this i-isn’t fair! Y-You shouldn’t have to die!” Kaede feels her eyes sting. “Momota, p-please don’t do this!”

“I agree, don’t do this,” Rantaro says. “We still have time to discuss-”

“Nope! I’ve already decided how this game ends!” Kaito declares. He pumps a fist. “I’m Kaito Momota, Luminary of the Stars! I’m the Ultimate Astronaut who is going to save all of his classmates!”

Kaede stares at him in horror as the elevator doors suddenly slide open. Her eyes go to Monokuma, who looks back at her with a grin. There’s a splatter of pink blood on his face that horribly reminds Kaede that two more of her classmates are now gone.

“Well, well, well, it looks like I’ve missed out on a lot!” Monokuma comments as he heads to his chair. “Does someone care to fill me in on what you’ve all been talking about?”

“We’re putting an end to this game, what’s what!” Kaito shouts at him. “We’re ready to end the class trial!”

“There hasn’t even been one,” Monokuma responds. “I’m here to hold a class trial for the death of Kokichi Ouma, correct?”

“Well we already know Shirogane is the killer,” Kaito says. “So-”

“And do you have the proof to back this claim?” Monokuma asks. “I can’t just take your word for it, you know?”

Kaito pulls a face and looks at Kaede expectantly. She sighs. “I-I’m guessing O-Ouma...Ouma didn’t eat his meal so...Shirogane poisoned him so someone died before the time limit.”

“And how are you certain of this?”

Kaede scowls, her face dripping with sweat. “S-She used Strike-9 Poison to kill him since I-Iruma’s poisoned never entered his system.”

“Strike-9 Poison? Ouch! I’ve heard that one hurts a lot,” Monokuma says with a smile. “Especially the longer it is in your system.”

“Shut up...” Kaede runs a hand down her face. She feels so hot yet so cold.

“Listen, let’s skip the bullshit,” Rantaro says sternly. “You already know that Shirogane is Ouma’s true killer and we know that we’re in a simulation and this game is a glitch. Even you must want this trial to end as quickly as possible.”

“Of course but I did want to have a little bit of screen time,” Monokuma mutters dejectedly.

“Although there is one thing I am curious about,” Rantaro admits, sending Kaede a guilty look. “I’ll make this quick. Monokuma, what happened to Iruma?”

“Huh? Why do you care about her? She’s long gone,” Monokuma says.

“It’s just her profile doesn’t list her as a graduated student yet Shirogane says the game adapts depending on the situation,” Rantaro says. “You let her go despite her not actually being Ouma’s killer.”

“Because I was trying to keep the game authentic!” Monokuma rolls his eyes. “But if you must know, well, if you’re all aware that we’re in simulation then you know how a student leaves it, right?”

“By surviving or...” Kaede blinks. “...w-wait...”

“There’s not actually an exit, you know?” Monokuma explains. “So once Iruma was away from everyone, I killed her instantly! Why are you all looking at me like that? It was a painless death I can reassure you-”

Rantaro shakes his head in disbelief. “Monokuma, there’s a glitch that causes dead students not to wake up.”

“Eh? Really?” Monokuma blinks. “Wow! I had no clue!”

“She had really thought that she was going to be able to leave...” Kaede murmurs. “But...”

“Oh well! It’s not like anything can be done about it now!” Monokuma says. “So swiftly moving on-”

“How the fuck do things manage to keep getting worse?” Kaito mutters. “Holy shit.”

“Ahem!” Monokuma scowls. “Well, it’s painfully obvious that there’s no reason to keep this game going now, is there? And you all look like you’ve discussed what’s going to happen next.”

“We’re going to have another killing game!” Tsumugi excitedly tells him, tapping her fingers together. “Monokuma, isn’t this so amazing?!”

“Uh, what’s up with her?” Monokuma asks.

“Despair, apparently,” Rantaro answers.

Monokuma suddenly has a knowing look on his face. “Ah yes, despair. I remember the first time I got to experience that. Good times.”

Kaede grimaces, gasping when her knees give out from underneath her. She lands on the floor with a heavy thump and she becomes painfully aware of her laboured breathing. “S-Shit...”

“Akamatsu!” Kaede is grateful when Rantaro is instantly by her side, rubbing her back carefully. “Hey, Monokuma. We need to end this game *now*.”

“That’s right! The sooner we can end this game the sooner I can save everyone!” Kaito pumps a fist. “So let’s start voting! I’m ready!”

“Hey, let me vote for you,” Rantaro offers as he presses down on Tsumugi’s face on Kaede’s podium. He reaches over and does the same for his own, refusing to move from Kaede’s side.

Kaito watches quietly, not pressing down on his podium.

“Ahaha...” Tsumugi smiles. “Momota? You’re the one who is joining me? Great! I can’t wait to see how I can break you during the next game!”

“Oh believe me, you won’t break me *or* anyone else!” Kaito slams his fists together. “I won’t let you!”

“Is that all the votes then?” Monokuma asks as a screen lowers down from the ceiling. It shows everyone’s faces. Tsumugi has two little lights next to her own face. “Congratulations! You all figured out who actually killed Kokichi Ouma!”

“L-Like it was h-hard...” Kaede puts a hand to her mouth as another cough wracks through her body. Blood seeps through her fingers.

Kaito turns pale at the sight of her, much to Kaede’s surprise. “Okay, Monokuma! I didn’t vote so you have to punish me along with Shirogane! Then that’ll leave Kaede and Amami as the survivors of this game, right?”

“That’s right!” Monokuma cheers. “Wow! I’ve certainly been a lucky bear today! I’ve got to punish four, no, *five* students!”

“C’mon, get on with it then!” Tsumugi whines. “I don’t think I can wait much longer!”

Something in Kaede snaps and she forces herself to stand up one last time, grabbing Rantaro’s arm and her podium to keep her up right. “Y-You...You really are evil, y-you know that?”

“Yes I am!” Tsumugi agrees gleefully.

“I h-hope whoever...whoever leads the group next...p-puts you through hell!” Kaede spits.

“Ooh, how scary!” Tsumugi rolls her eyes playfully, gasping in delight when a chain suddenly wraps around her neck. “Oh my! I think it’s my time to go now!”

Kaito yelps as a chain is wrapped around his neck too. He touches it delicately and before he’s yanked off the floor, gives Kaede and Rantaro a grin, putting a thumb up.

“You guys look after each other, okay?” Kaito says before his body is thrown into the air. “A-And believe in me! I’m getting everyone out of here-”

His voice is cut off when he’s dragged into another room. As much as Kaede wants to watch out of respect, her legs finally give up on her for good. With a pained gasp she collapses onto the floor, her back pressed against her podium.

She can barely breathe. Blood spills from her mouth like a waterfall. Even Rantaro wrapping an arm around her shoulders barely brings her any comfort. She’s dying and it hurts. It hurts so much.

“It’s all going to be over soon,” Rantaro reassures her helplessly. A rocket flies over their heads. “Akamatsu...everything is going to be okay.”

“Mmm...” Kaede fights to stay awake, dark spots taking over her vision. She decides to close her eyes for just a second and her head lolls to the side. She rests it on Rantaro’s shoulder.

“H-Hey, come on now,” Rantaro says and his voice sounds unusually thick. “You need to stay awake.”

“I-I am...awake,” Kaede insists quietly, cracking her eyes open slightly. “I’m...”

A small breath leaves her as she watches Rantaro grab her hand and squeezes it tight. She realises that...she can barely feel a thing. Unbeknownst to her, a teardrop trickles down her cheek and splashes onto her vest.

“Save your energy,” Rantaro tells her softly. “It’s almost over now.”

It feels like she’s not even in her own body. She can vaguely hear the punishments playing out in the background. Her pain...is gone. Another teardrop falls.

“Akamatsu...Akamatsu, don’t you dare die on me.” Rantaro squeezes her hand even more tightly, turning her fingertips white. “We’re going to leave the game together, okay? I told Momota that I’d look after you so...”

“...h-hey, Amami?” Kaede murmurs. She wonders if he can understand what she’s saying. “I-I’m glad that...I went through...through this game with...you.”

“Akamatsu, I told you to rest-”

“You...mean a lot to me,” Kaede admits. “I-I don’t...think...anyone has ever tried so hard...to keep me safe...”

“Akamatsu...”

“I just...” Kaede lifts her head up and tries her best to smile. “T-Thank you.”

Everything blurs after that. She can distantly hear Rantaro begging her to stay awake but she’ll have to apologise to him later because she *can’t*. She watches through barely open eyes as the room starts to light up, dissolving into a beautiful and pure white.

She smiles silently, tears streaming down her face as her legs are the first to be swallowed up by the light. The light feels warm and welcoming and Kaede leans into it as one last thought springs to mind.

If I could play a song right now it would be Rêverie by Debussy...

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Purple eyes slowly open.

“Hello...hello...hey!”

A person who is sitting at a desk jolts, rubbing their purple eyes slowly. They blink in surprise when a metal hand is thrust into their face.

“My apologies for waking you up so rudely but...well, I simply wanted to ask if you know where we are? My name is K1-B0 but please, call me Kiibo.”

The person blinks slowly.

“...can you at least tell me what your name is?” Kiibo asks hesitantly.

“...Kokichi Ouma.”

Kokichi Ouma - Chapter 1 Part 1

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the support on the previous chapter! I tried to write this as quickly as possible but I will admit I've struggled changing protagonists. I found Kaede rather easy to write but Kokichi has been surprisingly hard. I hope that haven't made him act out of character or anything ahaha

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

Kokichi Ouma wakes up with a headache.

He's in a classroom he has no recollection of even entering. The walls are messy, the floors are dirty and there's a weird drawing on the whiteboard. What's even weirder are the wires looped around the windows. It makes him wonder if the wires have been put there to keep people from leaving or from letting something get inside.

There's currently a robot talking *at* him. Whoops, Kokichi hasn't exactly been listening so if Kiibo or whatever his name is is expecting a conversation from him then he's going to have a very boring time. If he had to guess, Kiibo is probably trying to figure out what's going on right now which is, like, completely fair since Kokichi also wants to know what the hell is going on right now.

This certainly isn't his school. Kokichi's school is a lot cleaner than this. As for the whiteboard, well, Kokichi had always been the one who drew on it first out of all of his classmates and he knows for a fact he didn't draw whatever is on it right now. He pouts and rubs his forehead with his hand, wondering if he just slams his head against the desk and goes back to sleep then maybe he'll wake up somewhere different.

...although this certainly is quite the interesting situation however. Kokichi leans back on his chair and gives the room one last thoughtful look. Who did he piss off this time? He doesn't exactly remember coming here so that must mean someone brought him here. Well, it's not like he has to worry anyway. His group will come and save him soon and they'll all laugh about the situation over a game of cards.

"H-Hey, have you even been listening to me?"

"Sorry, I'm selectively deaf," Kokichi says. "As soon as someone says something I don't care about my ears instantly switch off."

Kiibo bristles. "How can you joke around in a situation like this? It's clear we've been kidnapped!" Kiibo slams his hands down onto Kokichi's desk with a worried frown. "Unless...do you know what's going on?! If you do then please tell me right away! I need to let my professor know that I'm alright!"

"Woah, woah, woah! Is a robot really calling me suspicious right now?" Kokichi stares at him in shock. "E-Even though you're the most suspicious thing here right now!"

“Don’t call me a thing!” Kiibo’s strange antenna, hair piece, uh, whatever the hell he’s got going on with his hair, stands up straight. “I am the most advanced robot to ever be created! My professor says I am just like any other Ultimate too! Just because I don’t have skin and bones just like you-”

“Huh? You’re an Ultimate?” Kokichi blinks.

“Yes! I am the Ultimate Robot! I told you earlier if you were listening-”

“Hah? When did the standards get lowered for Ultimate titles?” Kokichi pulls a face. “If you’re the Ultimate Robot then I might as well call myself the Ultimate Human!”

Kiibo’s eyes go wide. “M-My entire existence is very important I’ll have you know so don’t you dare mock me! Just me existing is proof that my professor is a very smart person and-” Kiibo jabs a finger at Kokichi. “You’re...not listening, are you?”

“Nope! At least you’re smart enough to figure that out!” Kokichi smiles. “Listen, Kiibaby-”

“Kiibo-”

“Didn’t ask, anyway...” Kokichi narrows his eyes. “How come you woke up before me, huh? Or is it that you didn’t even wake up at all? For all I know, you’re the one behind me being kidnapped! Listen, if you want something from me then you’re wasting your time. I’ll never give in to a glorified microwave so-”

“I am taking notes of your cruel remarks!” Kiibo announces. “Prepare to go to court over this! I will not stand for this robophobic behaviour!”

Kokichi runs a hand down his face. “Wow, you’re humanity’s most advanced robot and you have the personality of a forty year old soccer mom. Don’t you have a manager to go and bother?”

Kiibo’s face lights up. “You’re right! We should find whoever is in charge here-”

“We’re in a school, Kiibaby. At best we’ll find a teacher,” Kokichi points out. “But what sort of school ends up in a state like this? I can’t tell what’s disgusting me more right now, you or all the dirt on the floor.”

“I’ll...ignore that comment for now because you do make a good point,” Kiibo murmurs. “If this school is still in use then...why is it in such a state? Does that mean we’ve been put somewhere abandoned?”

“Beats me,” Kokichi says. “If you’re so smart and advanced then why don’t you know what’s going on?”

“Well you don’t know what’s going on either!” Kiibo retorts. “All you’ve done since waking up is bully me! Aren’t you the slightest bit worried? W-What if our kidnappers force us to do something horrible?”

“Just being in the same room as you is a big enough punishment for me,” Kokichi responds as Kiibo looks like he’s seconds away from exploding. Excellent. Kokichi has only been awake five minutes yet he’s already caused the first ever stroke to be experienced by a robot. Good times. “And what’s the worst thing that can happen to us? I’ve been in situations like these hundreds of times! We’ll be fine.”

“Of course someone like you has been kidnapped before,” Kiibo says. “Have you considered that you wouldn’t get into situations like these if you were a little nicer to people?”

“Eh? Don’t act like you’re blameless! You’re in the exact same situation as me!” Kokichi points out. “What? Did you get kidnapped for spilling oil on the wrong person or something?”

“I don’t spill...” Kiibo sighs. “Talking to you is a waste of time, isn’t it?”

“Really? I find that I’m quite entertaining,” Kokichi admits with a grin. “Oh, chin up, Kiibaby! At least you were lucky enough to wake up with *moi*.”

“I’d hardly call this situation lucky,” Kiibo says with a tired smile.

Kokichi playfully rolls his eyes. Okay, as much fun as it is bullying technology, he really should get a move on now. With a stretch, he stands up from the chair and is a little more than caught off guard when the room spins ever so slightly. He catches himself on the desk and blinks in surprise.

“H-Hey, are you okay?” Kiibo asks hesitantly. “Maybe you should’ve stood up a little slower.”

“Excellent advice, Kiiboy,” Kokichi says. “I too also think it’s helpful to give people advice *after* they need a problem solved.”

Kiibo grumbles and turns his back on him. Damn, technology really does suck. Kokichi shakes his head and pretends like he didn’t almost nosedive right into the floor and puts his hands on his hips. He wonders how long he’s been sitting at the desk for. He must’ve been out cold for a while for his body to protest like that. Ugh, what a hassle. At least only Kiibo was around to see.

“Don’t you have any cool robot functions to help us out?” Kokichi asks, half serious and half not. “Like do you have a super cool rocket arm?! If you do then I totally want to see that!”

“Of course I don’t have a function like that,” Kiibo says. “I’m just like every other person! I don’t need things like that when you don’t either.”

“So what you’re saying is that you’re useless,” Kokichi sighs, completely blanking Kiibo when the robot’s face turns red. “And you’re totally wrong about people needing cool rocket arms! Life would be so much cooler if we all had an arm we can punch through walls!”

“That would just cause a lot of problems!” Kiibo says. “Do you ever think things through?”

“Yeah, because I have a brain,” Kokichi responds, grinning when Kiibo pouts. “At least I’m capable of thinking, you’re just an overgrown calculator.”

“Just because I have to calculate my responses doesn’t mean you’re better than me,” Kiibo grumbles. “At least I’m taking this situation seriously! Something is obviously wrong and all you’re doing is making fun of me!”

“Geez, I’m just trying to lighten the mood up,” Kokichi says, putting up his hands in mock surrender. “It’s not my fault you’re so sensitive. I thought robots didn’t have feelings anyway. The fact that you care so much makes me wonder if there’s something wrong with you.”

“There’s nothing wrong with me!”

“So the robot says,” Kokichi murmurs ominously. “Anyway, why are you wasting my time? We should’ve left this room ages ago! Seriously, you’re such a time waster, Kiibo!”

As amusing as it is to tease Kiibo, Kokichi really does need to get a move on. Sitting around and doing nothing is boring and if Kokichi has actually been kidnapped, well, he’d rather just find whoever is responsible, scold them and then leave. Seriously, how inconsiderate of his kidnapper

to do this to him! He's a very busy person! All those untouched brick walls in the world aren't going to graffiti themselves now are they?

Kokichi gives the room a quick scan and realises that there's probably nothing in here that's going to help him out. Well, that just means he's going to have to leave and figure out what's going on himself then. He turns to leave when Kiibo grabs his wrist suddenly.

"W-Wait, are you leaving?"

"Well duh." Kokichi rolls his eyes. "There's no point staying in here! I have things I need to do so-"

"But what if we get punished for leaving?" Kiibo asks. "I don't want to make our kidnapper angry. Wouldn't it be safer to maybe wait a little while longer before leaving?"

"I'd call you spineless but you don't even have one anyway," Kokichi sighs. "Who cares if whoever is responsible for putting us here gets pissed off? They shouldn't have kidnapped us in the first place. You're not going to get very far in life if you just let people walk all over you, Kiibaby. I thought you were the Ultimate Robot, not the Ultimate Doormat."

"I'm just concerned, that's all," Kiibo says. "This entire situation is already bad enough and I don't plan on making it worse."

"Fine, then you stay in here on your own," Kokichi responds. "Whether you join me or don't really doesn't bother me in the slightest. However, I'm giving you a single second to let go of me before I rip your entire hand from the rest of your body."

Kiibo drops his wrist instantly. "I-I didn't hurt you, did I?"

Kokichi lazily rests his hands behind his head. "As if you could hurt me. I just thought you should know the last person who touched me without my permission got fed to a pack of snakes. Alive."

"Well, that's, um," Kiibo stammers helplessly, "why, exactly?"

"Oh? You don't know who I am?" Kokichi grins. "I'm-"

The door to the classroom opens violently. It's a miracle that the door isn't pulled from its hinges. Even Kokichi jumps along with Kiibo as a new person enters the room, looking around frantically. Kokichi clears his throat and raises an eyebrow at the new person, unimpressed by their overly dramatic entrance.

"What's your problem?" Kokichi asks.

"I..." The new addition to the room is a girl with blue hair. There's nothing unique about her at all. Her blue hair is long and wavy and her eyes are a very boring shade of blah, blah, blah. The girl licks her lips. "H-Have either of you seen anyone else here? Um...I woke up here alone and..."

"We woke up in here and neither of us have left this room yet," Kiibo explains. "Are you okay? You look very anxious. Here, how about you take a seat? I think you need to relax for-"

"I can't relax!" The girl peers outside of the classroom in worry. "Something...something is wrong!"

"Eh? Really?" Kokichi's head perks up in interest. "Like there's something wrong in a fun way or something wrong in a boring way?"

The girl blinks. “How can something being wrong be fun or boring?”

“Please just ignore him,” Kiibo says. “Talking to him is pointless unless you want to get bullied. If something is wrong then please tell us. The more we learn about the situation we’re in, the better.”

The girl opens and closes her mouth. “I...um, well...”

There’s something about the way the girl is refusing to look either Kokichi or Kiibo in the eye that causes alarm bells to ring off in Kokichi’s head. Huh, how strange. Is she lying about there being something wrong or is it that she doesn’t want to tell them what’s going on? She wrings her hands down by her waist.

“It’s just...you’re both the first people I’ve met here,” she says slowly. “And in a place as big as this I plainly thought that...there’d be more people around. I even checked the classrooms upstairs too but...”

“You weren’t expecting to find anyone in particular, were you?” Kokichi asks.

“W-Well, no, but...” The girl pauses. “I’m just really scared! Waking up alone in a situation like this is horrible!”

“You could try and be a little sympathetic, Ouma,” Kiibo says. “Don’t worry! You can stay with us until we figure out what’s going on!”

“What do you mean by *us*?” Kokichi groans. “Why would I want to stay around a robot who has done nothing but bully me ever since I woke up?” He gives the blue haired girl a wink. “And he’s going to bully you too, you know? You better run as fast as you can before he zaps you with his laser eyes!”

Kiibo starts to splutter whilst the blue haired girl blinks slowly. “Um...but...the, um, robot doesn’t look that scary.”

“Call me Kiibo!” Kiibo instantly responds. “Since you didn’t know my name I’ll let you off for now but please don’t refer to me as just a robot. I’m just the same as-”

“Everyone else, blah, blah, blah...” Kokichi rolls his eyes. “Do you only know the same, like, three sentences or something?”

The blue haired girl looks lost as Kiibo starts to rant furiously at an uninterested Kokichi, who is currently finding his fingernails a lot more interesting at the moment. “I-I suppose I should introduce myself too,” she says quietly and Kokichi peers at her curiously. “My name is Tsumugi Shirogane and, well, I’m the Ultimate Cosplayer.”

“Wow! Such a lame talent suits such a plain looking person!” Kokichi eyes the door desperately. If he has to spend one more second in this room to engage in the world’s most boring conversation then he might die. “Anyway-”

“Y-You’re not going, are you?” Tsumugi asks, shuffling to the side to block the door off with her body. Kokichi narrows his eyes. Hmm, if push comes to shove he could definitely slip past her but she’ll most certainly end up on the floor in the process. Poor Tsumugi, innocently heading into this room on the same day Kokichi woke up in it and chose violence as his way of dealing with things. “That’s not very leaderly of you!”

Oh? Oh? Kokichi raises a very interested eyebrow at her at the same time Kiibo says, “why would you think him of all people would be a good leader? He’s been nothing but a menace ever since

waking up.”

Tsumugi suddenly looks very alarmed as her eyes dart between the other two students in the room. She pales dramatically when Kokichi stares at her with a very amused look. “W-Well, um, were you, um, not listening when, um, um, when, um...” Her eyes light up. “Oh! You were ranting at him when Ouma told me he was the Ultimate Supreme Leader!”

“Huh?” Kiibo pauses. “Wait, you’re the Ultimate Supreme Leader? Impossible! How can someone like you have a talent like that?! Your social skills are non-existent and I figured that out after spending only five minutes with you!”

“What can I say? I’m a very charismatic person,” Kokichi says. “Buuut I’m super confused right now because I don’t remember revealing my talent! I think I’d remember saying it because I like to reveal things about myself very dramatically.”

Kiibo sighs. “Ouma, if Shirogane knew your talent then you must’ve said it. Why do you insist on being so difficult? I don’t see why Shirogane would have any reason to lie.”

Kokichi’s lip wobbles before he decides against flooding the room with his tears. No, he’s much more interested in the lying cosplayer at the moment. So she knows who he is, huh? How interesting. How *fun*. Even better, she has the audacity to *lie* about how she knows him too. Well then, if she thinks that she’s going to get away with that then she is as naïve as she is stupid.

Tsumugi seems to have finally composed herself. She clears her throat. “So, um, you both definitely haven’t seen anyone else then?”

“Yep! We’ve seen ten thousand people already so don’t think that you’re anything special!” Kokichi answers, grinning when Kiibo lets out a long and suffering sigh.

“No, you’re the only person we’ve seen so far,” Kiibo answers properly. “We were a little hesitant to leave the room-”

Kokichi scoffs. “No, *you* were.”

“-okay so I was a little hesitant to leave the room since I didn’t know what was outside of it. Is it...is it safe out there?”

“I haven’t seen anything dangerous in particular,” Tsumugi admits. “I woke up on the floor and...waited around I guess. I thought someone would find me but when that didn’t happen I decided to look around myself.”

The fact that she was expecting to bump into someone is a little suspicious. Kokichi puffs out his cheeks as he thinks before saying, “well, it’s lucky that you found us! I mean, since we’re in a school there’s gotta be a lot of classrooms, right? It’s very coincidentally lucky that you just so happened to find us right away!”

“I-I looked in different rooms too before coming here,” Tsumugi says.

“Ouma, stop antagonising her,” Kiibo scolds. “Shirogane, perhaps it’s for the best if we both look around together. If we’re in a school then I doubt that we’re going to run into anything dangerous so leaving Ouma alone is a very wise and beneficial option for our mental well-being.”

Tsumugi blinks in surprise. “Ouma...you managed to upset something that doesn’t even have feelings?”

“S-Shirogane?! You’re a robophobe too?!” Kiibo looks devastated.

“Actually, Kiibaby is right,” Kokichi says. “You both should totally explore the school together and leave me alone! I am dangerously allergic to robots and liars so being in a room with you both is going to kill me if I stay here any longer!”

“That’s a lie! No one can be allergic to robots!” Kiibo pauses before shrinking in on himself. “C-Can they?”

“Also I’m pretty sure people can’t be allergic to themselves,” Tsumugi adds. “The only liar in this room is you, Ouma.”

“Haha! How rude!” Kokichi smiles. “Anyway, I must leave right away because I am very bored and-”

“Maybe we should explore as a group,” Kiibo says warily. Kokichi stares at him with a killer smile that practically screams ‘why the fuck would you say that.’ Unfortunately for Kokichi, Kiibo does not have the ability to read his smile nor the room because he is a robot. “The more I think about it, leaving Ouma alone to do whatever he wants is just going to lead to trouble.”

“I think that’s the most Oumaphobic thing I’ve ever heard,” Kokichi says. “You’ll be hearing from my lawyer very soon!”

“Yes! Let’s explore together!” Tsumugi agrees and Kokichi wonders what he ever did in a past life to deserve to be in this situation. Maybe smashing his head against the desk really isn’t a bad idea. “Splitting up in situations like this is always a bad idea anyway!”

“Only if you’re stupid or not the main character,” Kokichi says. “And I’m very smart and would make an excellent protagonist for any story so I bid you all a heartfelt farewell for this may be the last time you’ll ever see me again. Kiibo, I leave you my very epic collection of toy cars. Shirogane, you can have a pen from my cool pen stash so you can brainstorm a new identity for yourself that isn’t awful. You’ll have to provide yourself with your own paper-”

Tsumugi suddenly chokes and Kokichi wonders if he said something that links in with the situation he is in. “Can we...get going now?”

“You can both leave whenever you both want,” Kokichi says. “I’ve already said I’m leaving so bye bye!”

He goes to push past Tsumugi but doesn’t expect her to suddenly grab his shoulders when he does actually get behind her. Her grip on him is devastatingly tight and he can feel her hands tremble.

“D-Don’t leave me alone!” Tsumugi cries as Kokichi instantly goes to swat her hands away. “You’re not seriously about to leave a girl alone in a situation like this, right?”

What the fuck. Kokichi contemplates ripping her hands from his shoulders but, well, there’s a line when it comes to being an asshole (loveable) then being an asshole (actual scum) and Kokichi considers himself the former of the two so as much as Tsumugi clinging to him makes him want to foam at the mouth, he doesn’t hit her hands away. He does, however, tilt his head back so he’s face to face with her and stares at her with one of his classic twisted faces.

“Hey, uh, Shirogane, do you want to let go or something?” Kokichi asks. “I have never let a woman touch me in my life and I’m not about to start now.”

Tsumugi tragically doesn’t take the hint or is just being an asshole (actual scum) and just squeezes

tighter. “But I’m scared!”

“Don’t worry, Shirogane! You can hold my hand if you’re that worried!” Kiibo offers and holds out his hand. Kokichi suddenly wants to kiss him on his robotic lips but unfortunately for him, Tsumugi does not want to hold Kiibo’s hand. No, she’d rather use Kokichi’s shoulders as a scratching post.

“I just want to get out of here,” Tsumugi admits as she all but pushes Kokichi out of the room whilst Kiibo follows behind like a lost little robot puppy. “Maybe there’s someone here who knows what’s going on?”

Wow, okay then. It seems Tsumugi has not only decided that she’s going to act super suspicious but she’s going to push Kokichi around too! Excellent, not only is she pushing him physically but she is certainly pushing him to his fucking limit too.

Tsumugi decides that they should explore a little further into the school and goes downstairs which is like, the worst thing you can do in a situation like this. The front door is literally over there Tsumugi, what the fuck are you doing Tsumugi, what are you trying to accomplish by going downstairs Tsumugi.

There’s a library which Kokichi couldn’t care less about. Tsumugi, however, peers into the room and then looks very disappointed when she finds that no one is inside. Once again, Kokichi wonders if she’s actually expecting to find someone inside. He’s going to have so much fun grilling her later. As much as he wants to question her now, he doubts she’s going to show her true colours in front of other people.

They do find someone in the games room. There’s a small man who looks like he’d rather be anywhere else when he spots the very unusual trio. Wow, smart guy. Kokichi hasn’t even opened his mouth yet and this guy looks like he’s already done with everything. A world record.

“Finally, we found someone else!” Tsumugi announces and even Kiibo stares at her like she’s stupid. Excellent observation, Tsumugi. Is there some invisible audience she’s telling or something?

“...you’re going to hurt him if you squeeze his shoulders any tighter.”

Fuck everyone else, Kokichi respects *this* guy. Tsumugi lets out a little gasp as she finally lets go of Kokichi, who in turn rolls his shoulders and takes a very large step away from her. He swears that she’s managed to dig her fingernails into his skin through his clothes. If she’s torn his shirt then he’s going to do some serious damage.

Kiibo starts introducing everyone else whilst Kokichi takes note of the disappointing lack of games. All the machines look broken and in turn, leaves Kokichi broken. What’s he supposed to play with now? At least the air hockey table looks like it’s got all the equipment for it to work. Maybe he can convince Kiibo to play with him later so he can fire the puck into his face.

He finds out that the absolute legend they’ve found is called Ryoma Hoshi. Ryoma says he was once the Ultimate Tennis Pro but isn’t anymore. Kokichi wonders why until Ryoma admits that he went to prison for killing a bunch of people. Kokichi’s respect instantly diminishes and he feels legitimately disappointed. If there’s one thing in the world he can never forgive it’s murder.

Ryoma clearly senses Kokichi’s discomfort and sighs, tugging on his hat as he turns his back on him. “Relax, kid. Don’t have any intention of hurting anyone here. Just thought it would be better to admit my mistakes before anyone else does.”

At least he's honest. Still, Kokichi gives him a blank look before clicking his tongue. "This room is boring. I'm leaving."

Although Ryoma tries, he doesn't hide the sudden flash of sadness in his eyes that he quickly masks over with a dead stare. The tennis player shoves his hands into his pockets. "...if I find anything out about our situation then I'll make sure to say something."

Tsumugi hurries after him as Kiibo stutters out an apology for Kokichi's very blunt words. She decides to instead latch onto his arm instead of digging her fingernails into him. He has literally no idea why she's turned to him for comfort and quickly realises that the situation has gotten ten times worse because, well, it's clear he's surrounded by idiots.

"Ouma, you didn't have to make him feel uncomfortable," Kiibo says as he finally catches up. "I don't think he's actually a bad person."

"Didn't they not teach you that murder is bad at robot school?" Kokichi asks. "Oh wait, I just realised you probably don't have the ability to distinguish good people from bad."

Kiibo pulls a face but surprisingly doesn't argue back. Huh, did Kokichi strike a nerve or something? Wait, Kiibo doesn't have any nerves. A wire then? Tsumugi, however, does have something to say. "I remember reading about Hoshi a couple years ago. I think he took out the mafia because they killed his family."

"I don't particularly care how tragic someone's backstory is, it doesn't change my view on murder," Kokichi says. "Murder is always a choice."

"...so you do have some morals," Kiibo murmurs. "And here I thought you were a horrible person."

"Oh, I'm not horrible. Just very annoying," Kokichi responds with a grin. Yuck, all this serious talk is making his skin crawl. "How about we go back upstairs now? There's clearly nothing of importance down here and I'm getting bored."

Tsumugi squeezes his arm even tighter as they head back to the first floor of the school. Kokichi tries to go outside but Tsumugi decides to tug him somewhere further into the school. Really, he should just pull his arm free and run but that feels like too much of a hassle. Instead, he sighs loudly and lets Tsumugi drag him to a completely new room. They end up standing by a blue door and Tsumugi pushes it open to reveal a warehouse.

Kokichi is quickly introduced to Miu Iruma who he has the unfortunate displeasure of meeting. She's vulgar, loud and desperate for drugs for some reason. He's sure that they'd actually get along if she wasn't so hellbent on bursting everyone's ear drums by screaming when the door opened.

At least she doesn't spend too much time bullying him. Her expression shifts to something very uncomfortable and lewd when she spots Kiibo and Kokichi sighs when the robot decides to hide behind him of all people when Miu goes to grab him.

"W-Why are you hiding?" Miu asks. "I just wanna...explore you a little, prod around inside of you..."

"This is getting really disturbing really quick," Kokichi says, twisting his body into an awkward position as Miu gets closer. "Can you be horny somewhere else please? Your expression is disgusting me to the point of tears!"

“H-Hee!” Miu flinches and holds her hands up in the air. “W-Why are you so mean? I-I just wanted to give Kiibo a little examination. I’ve never seen something so beautifully fucking made before!”

“You think I’m beautiful?” Kiibo somehow manages to blush.

Kokichi would rather not watch Kiibo and Miu drool over each other and tries to leave but Tsumugi seems annoyingly invested in whatever the fuck Kiibo and Miu have going on. “It’s a match made in heaven! A robot and an inventor!”

“Well, I’ve never made an entire robot,” Miu admits as Kiibo finally steps from behind Kokichi to get a little closer to her. “But I can appreciate a fucking masterpiece when I see one. That’s not to say I can’t make anything better though!”

“Duh, anything can be better than Kiibo,” Kokichi very helpfully says.

Kiibo splutters as Miu huffs. “Hah? Is your brain as tiny as your dick? Just because I can make something better than Kiibo doesn’t mean he isn’t pretty fucking cool. God, you’ve gotta let me do maintenance on you sometime, Kiibs. I’ll do fucking anything to get a good rummage inside of you.”

Ah, this is certainly a good time to leave. Kokichi would rather pull his eyeballs from his face with his own eyes than watch Miu drool over Kiibo for one more second. He forcefully makes his way over to the door, causing Tsumugi to stumble as he does so.

“H-Hey, are you both leaving?” Kiibo looks disappointed before turning to Miu. “Hey, you should come with us!”

“But I still haven’t found any drugs and I want to trip some fucking balls!” Miu goes back to rummaging through the shelves. “Screw what situation we’re in right now, I’m not doing shit until I find-”

“D-Drugs are very harmful!” Kiibo says in alarm. “And you can’t do maintenance on me if you’re under the influence! Iruma, please think sensibly!”

Miu actually pauses to listen, which is probably the strangest thing Kokichi has seen all day. “God, fine! I wouldn’t have said anything if I knew you were a little killjoy. I forgot how stuck up robots can be sometimes.”

Kiibo looks upset again, meaning everything is as it should be. Still, Kokichi would rather not be exploring the school with a group of people. He knows fuck all about the situation he’s in and any of these clowns could stick a knife into his back at any second. With a defiant tug, he frees his arm from Tsumugi’s hold and leaves the room. He isn’t surprised at all when he’s followed by all three of them.

He decides to dive into the closest room to see if he can find a way to lose everyone but unfortunately for him he just ends up walking into someone else. Great! No doubt this person is also going to want to join his group of merry misfits.

Tenko Chabashira is also loud and annoying but in a different way. Whilst Miu is vulgar and crude, Tenko is irritatingly uptight and has decided it’s her personal mission to slander every male in the world.

She, however, distracts Tsumugi enough for Kokichi to leave her side completely and Kokichi sees this as an absolute win. Kokichi takes his chance to bolt from the room before anyone can stop

him, sighing in relief when he finally makes his great escape. He hears Kiibo shout after him but like hell is he waiting around. Sorry, Kiiboy. You're on your own.

Kokichi decides to leave the school like he had initially planned. Obviously there's not going to be any way out inside a building so the best place is to look outside. He inhales as he pushes open the door and is prepared to exhale dramatically and walk away from the school when he notices one big fucking problem. Ah. A glass wall. How...fun.

"What the hell..." Kokichi lets the door slam behind him and stares up at the wall with an unreadable expression. What the hell actually is this? Is this a joke? When was he put inside of a snow globe without the snow?

He wanders down the steps to the entrance quietly. Okay, cool, the situation has suddenly become a whole lot worse. The chances of him leaving today has dropped drastically. It's...a rather disappointing realisation. He was set to just run and never look back. Hmm, it looks like he needs a new plan. What if he just digs a little hole under the wall and escapes that way?

"Hey! Over here!"

Kokichi blinks when he sees someone waving at him just a couple of steps away. Kokichi raises an eyebrow and approaches the floundering idiot slowly. Kokichi can't deny that this new person is very attractive. They're muscular and have a little goatee that, hmm, yes, Kokichi will definitely be trying to cut that off later for absolutely no reason other than it'll be funny. However, Kokichi also concludes this person has to be an absolute idiot since they don't even know how to wear clothes properly.

The attractive idiot introduces himself as Kaito Momota and apparently he's the Luminary of the Stars. Kokichi, of course, takes note of how much Kaito loves space and says, "oh, but you must be mistaken. I'm actually the Ultimate Astronaut."

"Huh? B-But..." Kaito looks shocked. "I'm definitely the Ultimate Astronaut! I have a certificate and everything to prove it!"

"Nuh uh, I'm the Ultimate Astronaut!" Kokichi insists as he childishly bounces his fists up and down. "I got the title after making the ground breaking discovery that the earth is actually flat!"

Kaito looks like he has died on the inside. His cause of death? He couldn't handle the truth. Kokichi cackles as Kaito struggles to string out a sentence.

"You're joking right!" Kaito asks desperately. "Don't tell me that you actually believe the world is flat?"

"Of course I don't think the world is flat, silly!" Kokichi smiles. Kaito sighs in relief. "I think the sky is flat! You see the sky? It's fake! A conspiracy! It's just a screen the government has installed! They totally control when it's day and night, you know?"

"W-What?!" Kaito goes back to dying on the inside. "That's the worst thing I've ever heard in my life!"

"But it's the truth," Kokichi explains as he puts a hand on his hip. "I'm super serious! I've never told a single lie in my entire life! You need to open your eyes, Momo-chan!"

Kaito looks like he's seconds away from breaking down. Kokichi decides to ease off just a little because he is a very merciful guy. "What's your problem?! A-And don't call me Momo-chan! That name isn't manly at all!"

Oh no, poor Kaito. Didn't he know that revealing what he finds annoying is only going to fuel Kokichi further? Rest in peace, spaceman. Kokichi has found a new target to bully and he's ready to roll. "Oh, my bad, Kai-chan."

"Kai-chan?!"

"If it makes you feel any better, I've got something you can call me which I'll totally hate!"

"Tell me!"

Kokichi winks as he lowers his voice. "You can call me any time."

Kaito goes from dying to a spluttering mess in a matter of seconds. "T-That's the stupidest shit I've ever heard in my life!" Translation: fuck, why haven't I used that line before?

Kokichi laughs at him. "You're just jealous. Anyway, are you the guy responsible for all of this? I really don't fancy staying here for much longer so if you could show me where the exit is then that'll be great!"

"I'm not the one responsible for all of this!" Kaito looks offended. "I woke up outside with a couple of others! We've been trying to find an exit but haven't been successful. But I'm sure if we all work together then we'll find a way out of here!"

Ugh, he's one of those people. Stupidly optimistic even in the worst of situations. An absolute beacon of hope for some people but tragically annoying for Kokichi who can only thrive in chaos. At least he's easy to tease.

Kokichi rests his hands behind his head. "Well you better get back to work, peasant! I'm a very busy person, you know?"

"Don't order me around!" Kaito grits his teeth. "How do I not know you're not the one responsible for all of this?!"

"Oh, you don't," Kokichi says. "But it'd be boring if I outright told you what my role in all of this is. If you want to figure me out then you'll have to do that yourself."

"Why you..." Kaito clenches a fist. "Quit screwing around! We could all be in danger, you know? There's no time for your attitude."

"Geez, we've only been awake for like, what, twenty minutes?" Kokichi shrugs. "Chill out, Momo-chan. You're the one who is going to be causing problems with your attitude. If you spend all your time yelling at people then nothing is going to get done!"

"Then don't give me reasons to yell at you then!" Kaito argues, crossing his arms. "You're the problem here!"

"I don't know, man. I'm not actually doing anything. You're the one getting worked up over me and in a totally boring way too," Kokichi says with a pout. "If you're going to be boring and yell at me then I'm just going to leave."

Kaito looks like he's about to combust so Kokichi spins around and walks away, ignoring the astronaut as he starts to yell about something regarding teamwork and escaping. Okay, cool, whatever. Kokichi has no clue why Kaito isn't a little wary of anyone at the moment. There's always that possibility that someone is going to use you or stab you in the back. Kokichi isn't the type of person to take risks like that. Why trust people when they don't give you a reason to? Even

then, what's to say that someone is only leading you on?

Kokichi ends up in a room with glass walls and fifteen bedroom doors. Curiously, one of the doors is missing. He looks at the picture above the door. It's of a girl with blonde hair and pink clothes. He looks around before whistling and peering into the room, his whistling dying down when he spots a splatter of pink on the floor.

...blood? That's blood, right? Huh...

It's only a small splatter, probably caused by a cut or a cough perhaps? Then again, if someone is in a situation where they're coughing up blood then that really isn't a good thing. Kokichi frowns and crouches down in front of the blood. It's dried up and matted into the carpet. The fact that there's a random blood splatter is incredibly concerning and it gives Kokichi a reason to be even more alert. Is someone hurt? Did their captors not clean the blood up on purpose?

Okay, so it looks like the situation has gone from worse to just tragically worse. Kokichi can easily give this situation an A rank on his tier list of bad things that have happened to him. He'd give it an S but at least he has people to tease.

He decides that staring at the blood is probably not going to actually get him anywhere so he swiftly moves on, bringing his attention over to the whiteboard that has a couple of pictures on it. He raises an eyebrow when he spots his face next to Miu's and reads the sentence that is near their pictures.

'Ouma was poisoned by Iruma and died in the girl's bathroom.'

Hah? That's...interesting. Curious. Intriguing. Weird. Strange. Suspicious. Wrong.

What the actual hell is going on here? Kokichi looks down at his hands just to double confirm that he's like, actually alive and not trapped in the Shadow Realm or something. Nope, he's definitely alive. Right? Right! Haha, silly whiteboard-san. God, everyone's stupidity must be rubbing off on him because...he's alive and so is Miu. He wouldn't put it past a sneaky bitch like her to do something so awful but...the whiteboard has to be tragically wrong.

...right?

It's his first time here in this school and he'd certainly remember if he had been here before and met such weird people. Is someone trying to play a trick on him or something? Is this a scare tactic? Yeah, that's probably right. The blood and the whiteboard are just lies. Kokichi is the king of lying too so he knows that he can tell the difference between a truth and a lie.

So...why does a small part of him think the whiteboard is telling the truth? How strange. He's starting to doubt himself which is a major no no, especially in a situation like this. He taps his face for encouragement. Man, he has to chill out. Kokichi appreciates a good lie but this is just terrible. Why lie if it doesn't make any sense? Wait! The whiteboard could just be someone planning or predicting something! Yes! That's a much more reasonable thought.

Double wait! That means that someone is going to die and that person is Kokichi! Okay, rewind time. The whiteboard is a lie. Fact. There's no way the whiteboard can be true. Also fact. Phew! For a second there Kokichi thought that something was actually wrong! Okay, it's time to laugh it off now.

Kokichi laughs nervously as his eyes switch from looking at the whiteboard to literally anywhere else. Well this is new. Kokichi doesn't think he's ever felt this legitimately...unnerved before.

After further examination of the whiteboard he comes to the conclusion that the whiteboard has to be completely wrong. Everyone who is on it...he's met before or is soon to meet probably. There's a picture of a maid and a guy wearing a mask that look annoyingly familiar now that he thinks about it. He bites the tip of his thumb and puts a hand on his hip. How perplexing.

He takes a step back and blinks when he steps on something. He lifts his foot up to see...a tablet? Kokichi pauses before picking it up and turning it on quietly. The tablet freezes for a moment and Kokichi wonders if it's broken when a message pops up for him to read.

'The owner of this tablet has graduated. Please return the tablet to the headteacher so it can be reset.'

The words flash at him before the tablet turns off. Huh, the owner of the tablet has graduated? Does that mean that there's different years at this school? Kokichi pulls a face. From what it seems, everyone he's met looks like they're the same age as each other. That means he has another thing he has to think about now. Cracking.

Actually wait a minute, does Kokichi have a tablet too? Since he woke up at this school it's only right he should have one, right? He pats down his pockets and sighs. Empty. What a shame, he was hoping that he would have a tablet with games on it. Oh! Maybe the headteacher has his tablet? Excellent, he still has the chance to play some good old Tetris.

He turns to leave but an uncomfortable feeling washes over him. He gives the whiteboard another withering glance, feeling something strange building up in his stomach. Wow, is he actually nervous because of some dumb prank? He really needs to get a grip already. If someone sees him worrying like this then he's the one who is going to get teased and that is completely unacceptable!

He forces himself to leave the room and wishes there was a door so he can hide the whiteboard. It's starting to make him sick just looking at it. Ugh, whoever is behind putting him in this school is seriously going to pay for this. Forget some harmless graffiti, Kokichi is going to *ruin* them. No one treats Kokichi Ouma like this and gets away with it.

After a look around, he ends up finding what seems to be his bedroom. His anxiety doubles as he heads up a set of steps to reach his door. Why the hell does he have a bedroom here and who the hell made it for him? What the fuck? What the actual fuck? Kokichi turns his door handle only to find that his room is locked. Angrily, he rattles the handle until he gets bored and drops down on one knee.

Good thing he always wears a couple of hairpins. They're strategically placed, of course, so no one will ever know about them unless they run their hands through his hair and if someone even thinks about doing that then Kokichi will bite their hands off instantly. He slides one out and pokes his tongue out as he sticks it into the lock.

"No, no, no! What are you doing?!"

Kokichi almost ends up sticking the hairpin into his skin as his hand jolts. Who the hell is the absolute moron who is trying to get themselves a pin in their eye? Kokichi snaps his head to the side only to blink.

A bear? A...bear? A robot bear? A black and white bear? Huh?

"Get away from that door!" The bear scolds him, throwing his angry little paws into the air. Kokichi, in turn, holds his hands up in mock surrender. "What are you doing?!"

“This is my room, right?” Kokichi says as he gestures to his picture above the door. “So I should be allowed inside.”

“You’ll be allowed inside when I say so,” the bear responds. “Don’t go around altering things when I haven’t finished investigating what’s going on!”

“Huh? There’s an investigation? Whatcha investigating?” Kokichi asks curiously.

“Oh you know, stuff,” the bear answers. “Nothing to concern yourself about! However, like I said, I don’t want you kids going around changing things I haven’t checked on yet! There’s a couple of anomalies that I need to check before I welcome you all here properly.”

Hmm, well Kokichi is now certainly intrigued. Anomalies? What does this strange talking bear mean by that?

“Listen kid,” the bear says, “I get you’re probably looking for answers right now but how about you just introduce yourself to everyone first? Aren’t you curious about who you’re going to spend your time with here?”

“I mean, not particularly since I don’t plan on staying here long enough to get to know everyone,” Kokichi answers. “So…”

“Ah, is that so?” The bear laughs. “Well, if you find an exit then feel free to go through it. Just tell me how that works out for you.”

Well that certainly isn’t ominous at all. Kokichi starts to laugh too. “Okie dokie!”

The bear follows him out of the dormitories which makes Kokichi wonder what the bear is trying to hide. Clearly the bear is involved with whoever put everyone here and by the time Kokichi realises this the bear has already gone. It’s a little frustrating but Kokichi guesses that there’s a high chance he’s going to see the bear again.

Kaito has moved on from waiting outside of the school so Kokichi decides to explore a little further into the school grounds, spotting a couple of students talking down near the bottom of a staircase.

There’s a huge guy with even bigger muscles than Kaito, a slim guy wearing a mask, a maid and someone wearing a bright yellow coat. There’s also Kaito too, who visibly pales when Kokichi jumps down the steps excitedly.

He can hear Kaito murmur a small ‘oh no’ before he introduces himself. “Oh ho! You must be the peasants Momo-chan cruelly nicknamed you all! Well, fear not! I’m Kokichi Ouma, the Ultimate Supreme Leader! If you join me and my organisation now then-”

“Is this the person you were warning us about?” The maid asks, turning to Kaito.

Kaito nods. “Yeah, that’s him alright.”

Kokichi gasps. “Momo-chan? You’ve not been slandering me, have you?”

“Momota said that you’re, um, very annoying,” says the huge guy wearing glasses. “But Gonta like to meet people first before deciding whether they annoying or not.”

“Angie also doesn’t judge!” Angie says as she bobs her head from side to side. “Only Angie’s God does and he says that you’re acceptable for now.”

“Acceptable for what?” Kokichi tilts his head to the side.

“Kukuku, I found the thought of meeting you quite intriguing,” says the guy with the long hair and mask. “After all, I do love studying human behaviour. I’m interested to see how you’ll react in a situation like this.”

“Uh, saying stuff like that makes it sound like you’re involved with us being put here,” Kaito points out.

The long haired guy shakes his head. “Nonsense. As interesting as I find this situation, I have much more important things I should be doing right now. At best, being kidnapped is a minor inconvenience.”

“Haha! Angie thinks you’re super weird for thinking that!” Angie clasps her hands above her head. “Angie has an entire island of people who need her so she would like to leave now! God is telling her that...the exit is nearby!”

“I’m afraid there’s no obvious exit anywhere,” the maid admits sadly. “I have checked the perimeters several times now. Unless there’s an exit within the school or a different building then we might have to prepare ourselves to stay here for a while.”

“Nah, fuck that,” Kaito says. “I have shit I need to do! I’m going to space soon, you know?”

“Maybe Gonta break down wall so we can leave?” Gonta suggests.

The maid flinches. “Please don’t do that. You or someone else might get hurt. No, no one here will be breaking down any walls. Unfortunately, we might have to sit tight until help arrives. After all, we’re all Ultimates, correct? It won’t take long for someone to realise that several have been taken and put somewhere hidden.”

“God says that Angie’s island is already looking for her,” Angie says. “He says that they’ve tried three times now to find Angie.”

“Three times?” The masked guy blinks. “But we’ve only just woken up, yes? Just how long have we been here for?”

“Your God is probably wrong,” Kaito says. “We haven’t been here long enough for people to notice we’re missing just yet probably. If we’ve all just woken up then at best we’ve been missing for a couple of hours.”

“I don’t know about you guys but I have millions of people looking for me right now!” Kokichi reveals. “As soon as they get here then I’m off!”

“Will you take Gonta with you?” Gonta asks. “Gonta need to tell his families that he is okay!”

“And Angie needs to get back to her island!”

“I have research I must get back to too.”

The maid lets out a sigh. “Everyone, please calm down.”

Kokichi ends up learning everyone’s names. The maid is called Kirumi Tojo. The guy with the mask is called Korekiyo Shinguji and he’s the Ultimate Anthropologist. He had already figured out Angie’s and Gonta’s names but found out their full names are Angie Yonaga and Gonta Gokuhara.

Despite the extremely weird situation, everyone seems to be taking it extremely well. Of course it's obvious that everyone is anxious to leave but no one is outright concerned despite the large glass wall that is keeping everyone trapped.

What makes Kokichi curious is when Kirumi pulls out a tablet from her pocket and asks if anyone else found one in their own pocket. Kokichi learns that Gonta, Kaito and Korekiyo all also have a tablet.

"Angie has a tablet in her pocket but it isn't hers," Angie admits as she shows everyone her tablet. "It says Angie has to give it back to the headteacher but Angie doesn't know who that is!"

Another tablet belonging to a graduated student? How interesting.

"Hey Ouma, did you not get a tablet?" Kaito asks.

"Mine didn't have cool games on it so I destroyed it," Kokichi lies, tucking his hands behind his head.

Kirumi sighs. "I'll take that as you didn't get one."

"But Gonta check student profiles and Ouma is there," Gonta says and Kokichi raises a curious eyebrow. "But a lot of students are also glitching, which really confuses Gonta!"

"Wow! I totally want to see that!" Kokichi says. "Gonta, give me your tablet so I can look!"

Gonta passes Kokichi his tablet over and Kokichi looks at it. He wonders if there's anything on it that'll help him. He first goes to the student profiles to check if Gonta is telling the truth and it turns out he is. There's five glitched out profiles that continuously squirm around. Each profile says that the student on said profile has graduated. Kokichi reads the names of each graduated student. Kaede Akamatsu. Maki Harukawa. Himiko Yumeno. Rantaro Amami. Shuichi Saihara.

He has no clue who any of these people are although their names do sound annoyingly familiar. Perhaps they're people Kokichi has met before but didn't care to remember. There's no one that stands out to him in particular. Hmm.

Kirumi clears her throat before frowning. "Ouma, there's a map function on the tablet and I see your icon in the dormitories. I presume that your tablet may be in your room for whatever reason."

"But I'm not allowed in there!" Kokichi sniffs, wiping away a fake tear.

"Huh? How come?" Kaito tilts his head to the side.

Kokichi pouts. "Some stupid bear told me that I'm not allowed in my own bedroom! How cruel is that?"

"...a bear told you that?" Kirumi raises an eyebrow. "My apologies but...are you lying?"

"Haaah?" Kokichi pulls a face. "You don't believe me?"

"Gonta no see any bears around," Gonta admits. "Maybe Ouma just imagined bear?"

"It was a robot bear!" Kokichi adds before realising how stupid he actually sounds. God, even he wouldn't believe anything he's saying right now. He sighs in defeat. "But that was just a lie! My door is locked so I can't check my room."

"Then why didn't you say that from the start?" Kaito sighs. "But at least you know that you have a

tablet.”

“What concerns me is that these tablets say where we are,” Korekiyo says.

“Angie says to just leave your tablet in your room then like Kokichi!” Angie suggests. “Oh! Kirumi! Does your tablet say where mine is? Angie totally wants a tablet too!”

Kirumi shakes her head. “My apologies but it seems that you don’t have an icon.”

“Eh?” Angie’s face drops. “That’s so not cool.”

“Perhaps when we find the headteacher he can get a tablet for you?” Korekiyo says. “After all, it looks like every student here has one. It’s a little confusing why only you don’t”

Kokichi zones out as he continues to go through Gonta’s tablet, finding most of the information useless until he reaches the rules. He goes through them slowly, keeping his face blank as he gets further and further down the list.

He quickly realises that the situation everyone is in is only going to get worse. He looks up at everyone innocently chatting away and comes to the conclusion that no one else has taken a look at the rules yet.

...it looks like things are going to get very interesting very soon.

Kokichi Ouma - Chapter 1 Part 2

Chapter Notes

Hey, long time no see! I don't want to say too much in the top notes so I'll leave an explanation about why this chapter took so long to come out in the bottom notes.

Thank you to everyone who left a comment and I'm sorry to everyone I didn't respond to. I hope you all enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Kirumi ends up herding everyone into the dining room after realising that no one was going to greet them outside. The two groups merge, meaning that there's currently eleven of them inside of the dining room.

Kokichi places himself next to Tsumugi and Kaito, giving Tsumugi a shit eating grin as she pulls a face at him. If she thinks that she's going to get away with lying to both him and Kiibo earlier then she has another thing coming. It's painfully obvious that she knows a lot more than she's letting on but doesn't want anyone else to know this.

Of course Kokichi could just call her out on her bullshit but he has a feeling that not many people are going to believe him. After all, Tsumugi is just a plain girl who looks tragically innocent. If she was in a video game then she'd make an excellent plot twist character where it turns out she's evil in the end. Well, actually, she is evil. Okay, so maybe Kokichi might be dramatic in thinking that but he has a hunch that Tsumugi is putting on *some* sort of front.

Kirumi ends up spotting that there's a kitchen and that there's food so she decides to cook lunch for everyone. It's a rather bizarre thing to do since why on earth would you even do that in a situation like this? Like, it's the same as going up to your captor and being like 'excuse me a minute whilst I use your kitchen to make myself some grub. You don't mind, do you? Of course you don't!'

For some strange reason Kokichi is the only person who thinks that eating at a time like this is fucking weird.

"Well since we haven't been stopped so far then it's safe to presume that we're allowed to eat, right?" Tsumugi says to him when he voices his concerns, albeit very sarcastically of course.

Tenko reaches for a sandwich. "And we should take advantage of the fact that we're allowed to eat at the moment! What if things get worse and we can't eat?! Tenko needs food to function!"

"Everyone needs food to function," Ryoma points out dryly, earning a glare from the aikido master.

"I don't," Kiibo very unhelpfully points out, looking rather disappointed as everyone around him starts to put food on their plates. He pulls a face and shies away from the table, looking down at his lap in dismay.

Kokichi rolls his eyes and barely holds back a very robophobic comment. He instead decides to glare at the food that's being passed around carelessly, narrowing his eyes when Miu snatches a bowl of mashed potatoes and shovels a generous portion onto her plate.

Is he missing something? He must be. After all, he's finding it hard to believe that everyone here can easily just help themselves to all this food and not be the tiniest bit worried. Like, no one knows how they even got here in the first place. Well, Tsumugi might know and Kokichi is desperately tempted to just flat out ask her since she clearly doesn't think that the food has been tampered with in any way but, well, she's obviously not going to say anything in front of so many people now is she?

It's not as if he has a bad relationship with food. If he's hungry then he'll eat something and his favourite drink is practically made up of just sugar and grapes. He just finds it weird how he can be so put off about an innocent looking meal made by the Ultimate Maid of all people.

He huffs and looks around, watching as Angie takes a large bite out of a rice ball, watching as a couple of grains tumble onto her plate. It seems Kirumi has made use of all the food that she's found. There's multiple plates set out on the table so everyone has a large choice to pick from. If circumstances were different then Kokichi would happily tuck in but the sight of all the food just sitting there makes his stomach churn.

There is the slight off chance that he's being a tiny bit dramatic, of course. He looks around at everyone eating and pulls a face. If the food truly had been tampered with already then everyone in the room would be ill or dead by now, right? Wow, maybe he should just chill out for a second and just eat something. Tenko did make a very valid point earlier.

It's just, well, what if what he puts on his plate is the only thing that's been messed with? Or what if Kirumi has already looked at all the rules on her tablet and is trying to kill everyone early on? He flashes a quick glance over to her across the table. She has a warm smile on her face as she passes Gonta a small plate of butter. He wrinkles his nose.

It could just be that he's overthinking everything at the moment, which is something he tends to do but it's literally not his fault that he's the only person smart enough to do so. If the world had no overthinkers then everyone would probably be dead. However, watching everyone eat makes him feel unjustifiably irritated. He wants everyone to put down their knives and forks and walk out of the room before something bad happens.

Kaito nudges his arm with his elbow. "Hey, you should get something before everything runs out."

"And risk eating something dodgy?" Kokichi fires back, leaning back on his chair with his hands behind his head. "No thanks. I'd rather not die because I ate some stranger's food that's probably laced with something awful."

Gonta pales as he pulls his fork from his mouth. "Is food bad?"

Kirumi shakes her head with a frown. "It shouldn't be. I checked absolutely everything. Whilst I understand that eating someone else's food isn't...something I would usually do willingly, we don't know how long we're going to be stuck here and-"

"Does anyone even know why we're stuck here?" Kokichi asks, giving Tsumugi in particular a daring look as he rocks back on his chair.

"No?" Tenko narrows her eyes. "Why, do *you* know why we're here? You're acting even more degenerate than a male usually does."

Kokichi wants to slam his head onto the table. If he hits the table hard enough then maybe he'll break it and also smack his skull off the floor and that will certainly knock himself out. If he's lucky enough then he might wake up somewhere where there might actually be people who have

their own brain cells and don't all use the same one. Has no one seriously not read the rules yet on their tablets? They've been awake for what, like, an hour now?

"Is there something you're hiding from us?" Kiibo asks warily, pressing his fingers together. "If you know what's going on--"

"I don't think any of us know what's going on at the moment, Kiibo," Tsumugi says gently, looking annoyingly serene as she slices into her food. "The situation we're in is understandable scary but I don't think acting out is going to get us anywhere."

Kokichi is well aware that was a dig towards him. Tsumugi decides to add insult to injury by kicking his ankle under the table. He kindly kicks her back in return because he is a fair person.

"It does seem strange though," Ryoma says quietly, setting his cutlery down. "The only reason why there would be food here is because someone expected us to be here. With the state the school is in I was certain this place is abandoned. However, there's working electricity and fresh food. It does make you wonder why we're here..."

"Maybe someone will explain why we're here later?" Angie suggests. She doesn't seem the slightest bit bothered about the situation she's in. "But why worry about things we can't control?"

Kokichi knows for a fact that thinking that way is only going to end in disaster. Seriously, is he missing something here or is everyone around him just incredibly dense? He swallows uneasily as Angie continues to nibble on her food. Huh, she really isn't concerned at all. Kokichi wonders what it must be like to be able to just not worry.

"Hoshi does have a point," Kiibo nervously points out. "There's no reason for there to be so much fresh food here. There must be someone waiting for us somewhere nearby."

Kokichi's eyes widen as he realises this might be his only chance to escape the dining room. "You are *so* right, Kiiboy! There must be someone waiting for us! How about we both go look for them and make a good first impression! I doubt anyone else here would be capable of doing that."

"I'm not sure if that's--"

Kiibo doesn't even get the chance to argue before Kokichi all but drags him out of the dining room by the hand. Sure, Kiibo is heavy but he's also dumb enough to let himself get dragged around because he's a walking doormat. Besides, out of everyone here so far, Kiibo has been the only person, no, thing that hasn't completely destroyed his hope of escape.

"Are you sure we should be wandering around like this?" Kiibo asks helplessly as Kokichi finally lets go of his hand and wipes it on his trouser leg. Kiibo frowns. "Why are you cleaning your hand? It's not like I had anything on mine."

"I'm just wiping off all the robot germs," Kokichi answers, poking his tongue out as Kiibo groans.

"If you're just going to be mean to me then I'm leaving," Kiibo says warily but doesn't turn to leave, which Kokichi sees as an absolute win. To be honest he couldn't care less if Kiibo left right now since Kokichi only used him as an excuse to leave. However, Kokichi would also like another person around as a witness since Kokichi has a feeling that black and white bear from before is going to pop up at any moment.

Kokichi shrugs and looks around quietly. They're currently in a hallway with several doors, one leading straight back into the dining room and that's the last place Kokichi wants to be at the moment. He's already checked these rooms and knows that they're only going to lead to dead ends

so leaves the hallway, a smirk tugging on his lips as Kiibo follows him helplessly.

“Do you actually think that someone might have put us here on purpose?” Kiibo asks as Kokichi traipses down another hallway, giving the barred windows a disinterested look as he does so.

“Well, duh,” Kokichi says as he raises an eyebrow at Kiibo. “No one remembers how we got here or why we’re even here in the first place. Everyone should be a lot more panicked than they’re acting right now.”

“I-I’m panicked,” Kiibo responds and looks unusually sweaty for a robot.

Kokichi grimaces as he takes a very obvious large side step away from Kiibo. “Which worries me since you’re not even *supposed* to have any emotions.”

“I try my very best to calculate appropriate emotional responses!” Kiibo argues as his face turns a dusty red. “And right now I have decided that I should be feeling really distressed right now! Granted, you’re probably at least fifty percent of the reason why I’m feeling so tense but-”

“Wow, not everything is about you, Kiiboy,” Kokichi says, hoping that Kiibo will shut up for literally one second. Kiibo bristles but doesn’t argue back.

They both end up going upstairs after realising that neither of them have checked any of the higher levels of the school yet. It’s basically a waste of time since there’s only more classrooms upstairs as well as what seems to be a music room with a large piano inside.

The conclusion Kokichi reaches is that everyone has been put into an abandoned school and that there’s someone who wants them all to kill each other. He hasn’t concluded why someone wants them all to do such a thing but he’s pretty sure that he’ll get an answer for that soon.

What else does he know? Well, there’s currently eleven Ultimates in said school. However, after looking at the tablet earlier it might be possible that there should’ve been sixteen of them here but five students have graduated somehow.

After reading the rules, it seems that the only possible ways of graduating are surviving the killings that are planned to take place or to kill and get away with it. If there’s five people missing then it’s likely that four of them may have survived two lots of killing games since there can only be two survivors and one person got away with a murder.

However, that’s only a theory. There’s no evidence to say what happened to the five graduated students. What’s more concerning is that Kokichi doesn’t remember any of them yet the tablet suggests that they’re all possibly in the same class. Hmm...how bizarre.

If Kokichi’s line of thinking is right then that would suggest that there’s possibly been at least three killing games yet...no, that can’t be right. This is the first time he’s woken up here, right? How confusing. He’s not going to completely ignore the idea that everyone has been here before but that would mean that everyone here would’ve had to have died before at least once and that’s where Kokichi struggles to come up with a reasonable conclusion to his theory.

What sort of situation could everyone be in where they can die but come back to life later on with a wiped memory? A simulation, perhaps? It’s very out there but seems completely plausible. Something sci-fi related must be going on, or something very medically advanced.

Kokichi knows for a fact that there’s a very important memory he’s missing and that’s the memory of how he got here. There’s no sign of him receiving a head injury, meaning he hasn’t lost his memory due to head trauma. That means someone must’ve removed that very specific memory

themselves somehow. Hmm...now that is certainly very interesting.

It also can't be a coincidence that every single person here can't remember how they got here. The only person who might have an inkling of what's going on is Tsumugi since she clearly knew who Kokichi was. Oh boy, Kokichi is *definitely* going to have to grill her later. He's not leaving her alone until she gives him some answers.

Clearly she's involved with the situation everyone is in, meaning she should probably already know about how there is someone who wants everyone to kill each other. Is that why she was so nonchalant about letting everyone eat earlier? Because she didn't care if anyone actually died from poisoning or not? Kokichi frowns as he chews on the nail on his thumb.

Perhaps he's over indulging himself right now. It's not the first time he's fallen down the rabbit hole of conspiracy theories. He doesn't exactly have much proof about anything either, only that he jumped to each conclusion he made because it was the most logical answer. Sure, suggesting that everyone is in some sort of simulation is definitely out there but it's certainly not impossible either.

And, well, if something isn't impossible then Kokichi Ouma isn't the type of person to chalk it up as so. Besides, something about his theory just feels...right.

"Um, Ouma?" Kiibo waves his hand wildly in front of Kokichi's face. "Hello? Earth to Ouma?"

Kokichi stares at him before giving the robot a lazy smile. "Yes?"

"You zoned out for a moment," Kiibo says. "Are you okay? Maybe you should get something to eat if you're not feeling well. You shouldn't skip meals, after all."

Kokichi dismissively waves a hand. "And risk being poisoned? No thanks. Besides, I was thinking, that's all."

"Thinking about what, exactly?" Kiibo asks hesitantly. "You weren't thinking up new insults to call me, were you?"

"Oh, you got me!" Kokichi rests his hands behind his head with a grin. "Ah, now my insults won't be as impactful now since you're going to expect them!"

Kiibo narrows his eyes. "Maybe you could try being nice to people instead. You're not going to make many friends if you just insult everyone all the time."

"Who said anything about me even wanting to make friends in the first place?" Kokichi asks. "What? Are you planning on befriending everyone here?"

"Well, yes?" Kiibo answers nervously. "I love making friends."

"You're such a nerd," Kokichi says, rolling his eyes. "And incredibly stupid too. How do you know this is the right situation to make friends in?"

Kiibo pauses. "Any situation is a good one to make friends, right?"

"...wow," Kokichi murmurs. He doesn't know if he'll be doing Kiibo a favour or not about telling him about the rules. Then again, Kiibo is probably going to see them sooner or later and when he does he's going to be eating his own words.

"A-Am I wrong for wanting to make friends?" Kiibo asks, looking disappointed.

Kokichi shrugs. "I dunno."

Kiibo pouts. "You're the most confusing person I've ever met."

"Aw, thank you."

"That wasn't a compliment!" Kiibo groans.

Kokichi smiles easily at Kiibo before a realisation hits him. Say that he is right about the whole simulation thing and that there's a way to alter memories...how would that work on a robot? Whilst Kiibo seems as oblivious as everyone else, well, Kiibo is also a machine. He's technology.

"Say, Kiibo," Kokichi says slowly, "how do you work anyway?"

"And why do you want to know?" Kiibo fires back, crossing his arms with a huff.

"Well truth be told, I'm completely stumped about how everyone who is human here managed to lose a very specific memory," Kokichi admits reluctantly. He raises an eyebrow at Kiibo. "But you're a robot and don't have a brain like the rest of us, right? So how do you remember things?"

Kiibo looks completely lost for a moment before answering. "Whilst it's true that I'm not like the rest of you, I don't like being referred to as just a robot. A-And whilst I don't actually have a brain I can be just as smart as a human can-"

"Kiiboy, can you just answer my question?"

Kiibo huffs. "Well I suppose to put things simply, you could say my brain is a computer of sorts. Everything I see and hear, everyone I meet, new experiences I experience and so on are constantly recorded by the cameras in my eyes and saved inside of my head. I can even save audio!"

"And...is there a way for other people to see your memories?" Kokichi presses curiously.

"Maybe, I'm not sure," Kiibo admits. "I'm certain you can hear my saved audio but I can assure you that I have nothing to play that you would want to hear-"

"Actually, maybe there is something important that we both need to hear," Kokichi responds, causing Kiibo to frown.

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps you managed to record some sort of audio from the moment you were taken and put here," Kokichi suggests. "I don't think anyone else here is going to remember how we got here any time soon but maybe you might be able to remember something important for everyone?"

"...oh! Y-You might be right!" Kiibo pumps his fists. "How did I not think of that?"

"Because you're a dumb robot," Kokichi answers.

"It's very hard to respect you when you say things like that," Kiibo mutters.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah..." Kokichi ignores Kiibo's offended face. "So..."

"So?"

"Aren't you going to rewind your memory or whatever to figure out how we got here?" Kokichi prompts expectantly.

“Out in the open?” Kiibo’s face pinches in concern. “Isn’t that a little risky?”

He’s got a point. Kokichi looks around quietly as he rocks up and down on the balls of his feet. He doesn’t see anyone around and doesn’t spot any cameras. He quickly does a check around the room to look for any hidden cameras but doesn’t find any of those either.

Kokichi’s face scrunches up as he looks around the room. Usually he wouldn’t take risks like this but if Kiibo can provide some sort of information about who their captors are or something then the risk will pay off. If he doesn’t then...well, that’ll be a problem for future Kokichi.

“Psh, you’re not worried, are you?” Kokichi asks. “We’re the only two people in this room so it’s not like anything bad is going to happen.”

“Well I can’t move whilst I play audio and...” Kiibo dramatically clears his throat for effect. “You’re not the most trustworthy person.”

“Hah? And what’s *that* supposed to mean?” Kokichi pouts. “Why would I do anything to you knowing that you might be the only thing that can help us right now?”

“I’m a person, not a thing,” Kiibo corrects him. “And whilst you do have a point, it’s just...”

“What, it’s not like we’re going to be listening to hours of your memories or audio or whatever you want to call it,” Kokichi says, raising an eyebrow when Kiibo’s eyes look a little too distant for a moment. “Eh? What’s your deal?”

Kiibo shakes his head. “Sorry, something you said sounded kind of familiar, that’s all. It stumped me for a moment.”

“Familiar you say?” Kokichi hums as he thinks. “How so?”

“I’m not sure,” Kiibo admits. “I just had this strange feeling when you said something about us listening to hours of my audio. I’m not sure why but...no, forget it. I’m not really sure why I’m overthinking everything at the moment.”

“Yeah...” Kokichi murmurs, narrowing his eyes curiously. “How strange...”

“Perhaps I experienced what it called a moment of *deja vu*,” Kiibo says, suddenly looking excited. “Although that is a strange thing for a robot to experience! That must mean I’m becoming more human by the second!”

Well he certainly cheered up quickly. Kokichi shrugs as he gives the robot a semi amused smile. “Maybe you did. Maybe you didn’t. However, aren’t we wasting time? The sooner we listen to your audio, the better.”

“Oh, you’re right!” Kiibo smiles before it disappears. “But still, the idea of me being vulnerable even for a second makes me feel really uncomfortable.”

“C’mon, I’m not that bad,” Kokichi whines, holding his hands up in mock surrender. “What do you think little old me could even do to you in like the span of ten seconds anyway?”

“It’ll take much longer than ten seconds to find and listen to what we need to,” Kiibo says with a frown. “And surprisingly, it’s not you who I’m worried about.”

“Oh? And here I thought I was the problem,” Kokichi says. “So if I’m not the problem then...what is?”

“Well it’s like I said,” Kiibo responds as he crosses his arms. “I’m vulnerable whilst playing my audio. I can’t move but I can see.”

“Then surely you’ll be able to use your super cool robot eyes to keep an eye out for anything dangerous, right?” Kokichi asks as his patience starts to fray. “And I’ll be here too so you’ll have an extra set of eyes!”

Kiibo clearly hesitates for a moment before sighing. “Fine, let me just make sure that I’m playing the right part. Just...promise that you won’t mess around and keep a lookout for anything suspicious.”

“Fine, fine, I will,” Kokichi promises. He was planning to from the start anyway.

Kiibo hums as he fiddles with a large disc where his ear should be, eyebrows furrowing as he continues to spin it for a rather long time. “Um...there’s certainly a lot more audio on here than I expected.”

“And is that supposed to mean anything or...”

“Well, I’m not supposed to have this much audio saved,” Kiibo explains. “I have...a rather complicated system going which I gather you don’t care about.”

“Correct!”

Kiibo rolls his eyes. “Anyway, I just find it strange that I have so many hours saved. I’d listen to it but it’s probably more important to figure out who our captors are, correct?”

“Oh yeah, absolutely,” Kokichi says. “Just skip to when you woke up here and then rewind just a little until we hear something else again.”

“Right, got it.”

Kokichi rocks back and forth on his heels as he watches Kiibo adjust the disc slowly. He can hear garbled noises play out of Kiibo’s mouth as the robot works, which is pretty amusing to listen to. Kiibo soon slows down enough and eventually presses down on his ear.

“My name is K1-B0 but please, call me Kiibo.”

“That’s it!” Kokichi excitedly pumps his fists a little too childishly. “Now rewind just a tiny bit more.”

Kiibo sighs before twisting the disc ever so slightly before pressing down again.

There’s some crackling that causes Kokichi to cover his ears before silence. Both Kiibo and Kokichi wait in anticipation. If Kokichi has somehow managed to secure some evidence pointing to the culprits behind all of this so early on then he’ll be absolutely ecstatic. He can’t wait to leave and never think about this place again.

His head snaps up in interest when he can hear some distant voices. Kiibo must’ve recorded a conversation that was happening some distance away from him.

“That’s not the point. At least let me clean the scratches for you.”

“They don’t need cleaning...”

“Actually, I remember seeing some first aid kits in the warehouse when I checked it out a while

ago...”

Kokichi doesn't recognise the first two voices, the first voice belonging to a male and the second a female. However, he's wholeheartedly certain that the third voice belongs to Tsumugi. He raises an eyebrow as the conversation continues before there's another momentary silence.

Then, there's footsteps.

“It's such a shame I have to do this,” Tsumugi's voice says before there's a loud crack that echoes around the room.

Kiibo's face morphs into one of horror as the audio plays out multiple sounds of what is obviously Kiibo being broken into pieces. Even Kokichi feels sick as the audio continues to play before it stops abruptly. During the next pause Kokichi clears his throat as he looks away. He can't help but feel slightly guilty that he unknowingly made Kiibo listen to his own fucking murder.

When the audio plays again, it's Kiibo speaking.

“Hello...hello...hey!” There's a pause. “My apologies for waking you up so rudely but...well, I simply wanted to ask if you know where we are?”

“You can turn it off now,” Kokichi says softly.

Kiibo's face looks pathetically sad to look at as he presses the disc once more before letting his hand flop down by his waist. “...that was Shirogane's voice, right? Why...why did she do such a thing?”

Kokichi shrugs helplessly. Aw man, out of all the things he expected to hear, listening to Kiibo get broken to pieces wasn't one of them. “I don't know, Kiibo.”

“Does she even remember what she did?” Kiibo asks anxiously as he wraps his arms around himself. “When we met her earlier...she didn't know who either of us were, right? Was she just pretending not to know or...”

“Kiibo, I really don't know,” Kokichi says.

He didn't expect that. He didn't expect to hear Kiibo being smashed into pieces before waking up in a classroom. There...there wasn't any noise in between. It was almost as if Kiibo just transported from one area to the next. One moment he was clearly with Tsumugi and the next he was waking up in a classroom with Kokichi.

And the cause? Kiibo *died*.

Kiibo died and then he woke back up. It should be impossible. Well, there's always that off chance that someone put Kiibo back together again since he's a robot but...

“...can you detach your limbs from your body?” Kokichi asks hesitantly.

Kiibo shoots him a dry look. “Are you trying to be funny right now?”

“No, I promise I'm just genuinely asking,” Kokichi answers.

“...no, I'm not designed to be taken apart,” Kiibo finally says. “I can have upgrades added but...no, I'm not designed to break.”

“Then how...” Kokichi trails off as he looks Kiibo up and down. “...huh.”

Kiibo is clearly more than shaken up as he stares at the floor quietly. "...did you know that I was going to hear that? Is that why you pushed for me to play my audio?"

"What?" Kokichi stares at him incredulously. "You seriously think I would make someone listen to something like *that*?"

"Well I don't know," Kiibo mutters. "I just...I wish I never heard that."

"You and I both, Kiiboy," Kokichi murmurs. He signs before running a hand through his hair.

"Listen, how about we just pretend we didn't hear that?"

"How could I forget something like that?!" Kiibo looks at him in disbelief. "Someone, no, *Shirogane*...killed me! We both heard the same thing, right? Shirogane killed me and now she's pretending like she didn't! Why?!"

"I don't *know*, Kiibo!" Kokichi throws his hands up in the air as he grits his teeth. "Clearly something strange is going on so how about you calm down before you combust?"

"How can I calm down after learning that..." Kiibo trails off quietly. "That Shirogane did something like that. We...we need to warn the others!"

"What?"

Kiibo springs back to life as he starts to rush towards the door. "Ouma, we need to warn the others about Shirogane! She's clearly not a safe person to be around! What if she tries to hurt someone else?! We need to let everyone hear what we heard-"

"Woah, woah, woah! Slow down, Kiiboy!" Kokichi blocks the door off with his body. "Are you stupid? If we rush in and start spouting about how Shirogane is evil then we're the ones who are going to look suspicious."

"But I can just play my audio and prove to everyone that Shirogane isn't safe to be around!" Kiibo argues as he tries to push past. "I can't just stand around and wait for Shirogane to hurt someone else!"

"Isn't there something else you should be more concerned about right now?" Kokichi presses as he pushes Kiibo back. The robot stares at him. "Kiibo, you literally heard yourself die yet you're clearly alive. Aren't you curious why?"

"Well..." Kiibo hesitates, "...of course I am but isn't apprehending Shirogane much more important right now?"

Kokichi shakes his head. "If we run into the dining room now and accuse her of murder then she's going to get spooked. Everyone thinks she's just some innocent girl, Kiiboy. People are going to be much more suspicious of you since you're going to be accusing her of doing something kind of impossible."

"B-But my audio-"

"If Shirogane truly is a bad person and is involved in keeping us captive here then isn't it for the best that we hide what we know?" Kokichi tells him, lowering his voice as he does so. "We don't want to put targets on our backs now do we?"

"But the others-"

"I don't think anything bad is going to happen...for now," Kokichi says. "But something bad will happen if we start throwing around accusations for no reason. We need to keep the audio between the two of us for now. Can you do that?"

Kiibo helplessly looks at Kokichi and then at the door, eyes flickering back and forth. "...no, I don't think I can. I can't let anyone get hurt. My professor programmed me to strongly believe in keeping people safe."

"Did your professor not also program you to keep yourself safe too?" Kokichi argues, abruptly stopping Kiibo as he dives for the door again. "If you tell everyone that we both listened to the audio then you'll be putting me in danger too, you know?"

"Well..." Kiibo pauses. "I..."

"Quite frankly I'd rather not die because you did something stupid," Kokichi presses. "And revealing everything you know to everyone right off the bat is one the stupidest moves you could do in a situation like this, you know."

"Then maybe...maybe we can just talk things through?" Kiibo asks, sounding way too innocent. "E-Even though we heard her break me I'm still alive so..."

"Do you seriously think our kidnappers are going to sit down and negotiate with us?" Kokichi fires back in disbelief. "Kiibo, they kidnapped us for a reason! And do you know what that reason is?"

Kiibo blinks. "Well, no-"

"Read the rules on your tablet."

Kiibo shoots him a confused look before pulling out his tablet and clicks on the button that will load up the rules. Kiibo grips onto his tablet tightly as he goes through the rules slowly, his jaw dropping ever so slightly as he reads through more and more of them.

"How did you..." Kiibo gasps. "You *knew* about the rules and didn't tell anyone about them?!"

"It's not my problem that everyone hasn't read the rules yet!" Kokichi argues, crossing his arms with a huff. "Aside from Angie, I'm literally the only person who doesn't have a tablet yet still had the common sense to read through them!"

"Still, you should have warned everyone else earlier!" Kiibo says bitterly. "You do realise that our situation has just gotten a whole lot worse, right?! Ouma, we can't just stand around and wait for everyone else to realise that we're in danger! We need to warn everyone now!"

Kokichi grabs Kiibo's wrist as the robot once again tries to force his way out of the room. "And what are you going to tell them, huh? Sure, everyone is going to learn about the rules sooner or later but if you bring up Shirogane then things are going to get even worse."

"And how do you know that?" Kiibo asks. "We have plenty of strong people in our group! I'm sure Gonta could apprehend Shirogane if push comes to shove-"

"And how do we know that Shirogane isn't working with anyone else?" Kokichi grits his teeth. "I've already seen someone, well, something else here so I know that we're not entirely alone-"

"You failed to bring that up with everyone else too?!"

Kokichi's patience frays even further. "I did bring it up and no one believed me!"

“What? Why?”

“Because...” Kokichi sniffs. “I told them I saw a black and white robot bear and they all thought I was messing around.”

“A black and white...” Kiibo stares at him. “...if I hadn’t heard what I just did moments ago then I’d also think you were just messing around.”

“Oh, so you tell me off for being robophobic but when I warn everyone about a *robot bear* you think I’m crossing a line?” Kokichi pouts. “You’re such a hypocrite, Kiiboy.”

“W-Well...” Kiibo sighs. “A-Anyway, did the bear mention anything important?”

“Not really,” Kokichi answers as he cautiously lets go of Kiibo’s wrist. “He clearly didn’t want me anywhere near the dormitories for some reason since he practically threw me out when he saw me inside.”

“If he didn’t want you inside then that must mean he’s trying to hide something,” Kiibo says. “So does that mean he might be behind us being brought here?”

“Maybe? He did mention that he knew there were other students here and that I should befriend them for whatever reason,” Kokichi responds.

Kiibo brings a hand to his chin. “So the logical conclusion to jump to is that the bear and perhaps Shirogane are behind us all being put here...”

“Since Shirogane is mingling with everyone here then it’s safe to presume that we weren’t supposed to know about Shirogane being involved in all of this,” Kokichi explains hastily. “Meaning it’s probably safer for both of us to just pretend that we haven’t figured her out-”

“Hold on...perhaps we’re jumping to the wrong conclusion,” Kiibo says slowly. “We only know that Shirogane killed me because of my audio and because of the rules I’m inclined to believe she only tried to kill me to leave the killing game.”

Kokichi pauses before he rolls his eyes. “Kiibo, it’s painfully obvious that she’s involved in whatever the hell all of this is. She knew who I was before I even introduced myself.”

“She said that you already told her,” Kiibo argues weakly.

“She lied, Kiiboy,” Kokichi says. “And as a professional liar I know when someone is lying to me.”

“Then...then why did she kill me if she’s involved with running...whatever this is?” Kiibo asks. “If she has to follow the rules like the rest of us then...wouldn’t her killing someone be too big of a risk to take?”

“I don’t know how to answer that,” Kokichi admits before putting a hand to his chin. He starts to pace back and forth. “But what’s confusing me is how we all ended up here. How are you here? We heard you die but you’re clearly very much alive.”

“Maybe I’m a ghost?” Kiibo suggests with wide eyes. He looks down at his body in horror. “I don’t know whether to be scared or amazed to be the first ever robot ghost!”

“You’re not a ghost, don’t be stupid,” Kokichi says as kicks Kiibo’s leg ever so slightly. “If you were a ghost then I wouldn’t be able to touch you.”

Kiibo pouts as he takes a step back. “Maybe...maybe I just got put into a new body?”

Kokichi shakes his head. “No, that doesn’t sound right. Let’s stick to facts, Kiiboy. You died.”

“You don’t have to put it so bluntly...”

“The rules also state if you murder someone and don’t get away with it then you’re punished, which is what I presume what happened to Shirogane since she’s still here,” Kokichi adds. “We know the rules are followed because there’s five graduated students, meaning that some of them have either survived a previous killing spree or killed and managed to get away with it.”

“Then are you saying that this isn’t our first killing spree?” Kiibo asks, tilting his head to the side. “I fail to see how that is possible. I don’t remember any other previous killing sprees.”

“Neither do I but your audio proves that some of us have been here before,” Kokichi says. “And there were also those two other people in your audio too. I’m willing to bet those two people are two of the graduated students.”

“But that doesn’t explain how *we* got here,” Kiibo argues. “It’s obvious from the rules that you either live to the end of a killing spree or end up a victim.”

“Well there’s only one obvious answer, duh,” Kokichi says as he spreads his arms out. “Everyone here must’ve just died in a previous killing spree and came back to life again!”

“That’s impossible and you know it!” Kiibo fires back. “Please, try to be serious-”

“Oh, I *am* being serious!” Kokichi says with a grin. “Think outside of that puny little box you’ve trapped yourself in. It’s obvious whatever situation we’re in is abnormal, meaning it’s not unreasonable to think that abnormal things can happen to us!”

“You’re...you’re actually being serious...” Kiibo wrings his hands together. “Do you actually believe in what you’re saying?! How have you managed to jump to such a conclusion so quickly?!”

Kokichi shrugs. “Because.”

“...because?”

“It seems like the most reasonable conclusion to jump to.”

“*How?!?*”

“Well let’s say we’re...” Kokichi tilts his head from side to side as he tries to come up with a simple explanation. “We’re in a simulation of some sorts. Maybe we’re all hooked up to some sort of computer and just don’t know it. In a simulation, when you die you just reset, right? Maybe that’s what sort of situation we’re in right now?”

“I suppose if you are right then it would explain how I died and came back to life,” Kiibo begrudgingly murmurs. “But do you have any proof?”

“Nope!” Kokichi admits as he pops the ‘p’ very loudly. “But isn’t it more fun to find the evidence than getting it handed to you?”

“N-No! I would prefer to know what is actually going on!” Kiibo answers. “And don’t talk about dying so casually either! Just because I’m a robot doesn’t mean I can’t feel sad either and hearing myself get destroyed like that...” Kiibo’s eyes darken.

Okay, so maybe Kokichi should pity the robot just a tiny bit. It may or may not be his fault that Kiibo heard his own death in the first place but in his defence it wasn't like he knew Kiibo was going to hear such a thing. He sighs loudly and puts a hesitant hand on Kiibo's shoulder. "Listen, Kiiboy..."

Kiibo lifts his head up curiously.

Kokichi droops. "Oh, you actually want me to say something comforting. I was kind of hoping you'd be like 'please don't say anything because I'm brooding' but now I actually have to think of something nice to say."

"Oh, so you're admitting that you're not actually a nice person?" Kiibo asks and Kokichi swears he can hear a hint of sarcasm in his voice.

"I can so be nice," Kokichi argues back. He clears his throat. "Kiibo, your death was...it was... very quick."

"Yes, yes it was," Kiibo agrees as he nods solemnly. "Perhaps I should take comfort in knowing I probably didn't suffer."

Kokichi mentally pumps a fist into the air. Who knew the way to comfort a robot was to say something logical? Oh wait, of course that's the right way to reassure a robot. It's not like Kiibo is human and actually feels emotions.

"Maybe you can be nice," Kiibo says quietly before sighing. "So what are we going to do now then?"

"Oh? Are you relying on little old me for a plan?" Kokichi asks.

"Well unfortunately you are the only person who I can turn to right now," Kiibo admits and Kokichi pokes his tongue out at him. "If you think that rushing to tell everyone now about Shirogane and the bear is a bad idea then...I won't. Only if you think that doing so will keep everyone safe however. You're not hiding what we know from everyone for selfish reasons, right?"

"Of course not!" Kokichi says, keeping a straight face as he does so. Okay, so maybe a tiny part of him is being selfish but hey, he really doesn't want to die and that's totally a valid reason to hide things from people, right? "For now let's just keep what we know about Shirogane between the two of us. Hopefully by now someone else has noticed the rules and we can just pretend that we only found out about them too."

Kiibo nods before wringing his hands together once more. "Um, Ouma?"

"Hmm?"

"...thank you for looking out for me," Kiibo says softly. "And for, well, not letting me do anything stupid. I understand that sometimes I can pick the wrong choices because I don't understand things like emotions so..."

Kokichi almost chokes. He didn't convince Kiibo to keep quiet because he *cares* about everyone. He did it so neither of them get a target slapped onto their back and to buy himself some more time to figure out what to do next. Kokichi was only thinking logically, not emotionally.

...although if Kiibo wants to worship the ground he walks on then he can do so. Kokichi certainly won't complain.

“I just...I really don’t want anyone to get hurt,” Kiibo admits. “I know we don’t know each other that well but that doesn’t mean I want to watch people kill each other.”

“Of course no one wants to watch that,” Kokichi says before pausing. “Probably.”

“Well at least one person does, otherwise why would we be put here in the first place?” Kiibo says and Kokichi shoots him an amused look. Oh? Kiibo is making a valid point? How interesting. “Anyway, should we head back to the dining hall? We should probably stay in a group from now on.”

“I mean, I prefer to work solo but I suppose being in a group won’t hurt for now,” Kokichi says before finally letting Kiibo open the door. He steps to the side and rests his hands behind his head.

Kiibo opens the door and promptly yells when he spots the same black and white bear Kokichi saw earlier. Kiibo even has the *audacity* to hide behind Kokichi nervously as the bear grins up at both of them.

“Well that wasn’t the sort of greeting I was expecting!”

Well fuck, how long has that bear been standing around listening for? Kokichi knows for a fact that he wasn’t outside of the room a couple of minutes ago when he checked so he can’t have been standing around for too long, right?

Ugh, who is he kidding trying to comfort himself? That bear obviously *knows* that they know quite a fair bit now and that is certainly not a good thing. Kokichi smiles tightly as the bear looks at him expectantly.

“So, what are the two of you up to? Care to explain why you’re not with everyone else?”

“We decided to have a look around together,” Kokichi answers as Kiibo stumbles for a convincing answer. “There’s not a problem with that, is there?”

“Oh, of course not,” the bear says. “The rules would state otherwise, right?”

Kokichi’s smile tightens. “Of course.”

He can feel Kiibo fidget nervously behind him. “Um...”

“So I couldn’t help but overhear that...” the bear pauses before tilting his head to the side. “Now what was it I overheard again? Hmm...”

Aw shit, he knows. The bear fucking knows everything. He wouldn’t be acting this way otherwise. Kokichi shifts his weight from one foot to the other. “Eh? Did you hear us say something strange?”

“I don’t know. Did I?”

“Hnnng...” Kiibo makes a pathetic sound from behind him. “I-I haven’t said anything strange.”

Kokichi closes his eyes before taking a deep breath, making sure his smile is still in place. Clearly Kiibo has never been in a situation before where he has to lie to save his actual fucking life. “Maybe your robotic bear ears are playing up?”

“We both know there’s nothing wrong with my ears,” the bear responds and all but confirms that he’s overheard way too much. “Anyway, enough about my ears. I simply came to find you both so I fill everyone in on what’s happening.”

“Oh? You mean you’re going to go over the rules with us?” Kokichi asks casually.

The bear pauses. “Yes, something like that.” There’s something sinister about the way the bear is looking at them both. “I plan to explain what’s going on inside of the gym when everyone is ready. There’s a couple of things I need to do beforehand so don’t worry about rushing on down.”

Both Kokichi and Kiibo watch quietly as the bear saunters away with an air of confidence that Kokichi really doesn’t like. He swears under his breath before turning to look at Kiibo.

“Well then...”

“Ouma, that bear clearly heard us earlier!” Kiibo frets as he grabs Kokichi’s shoulders nervously. “What...what are we going to do?! Is he going to kill us? I-I don’t know how to deal with this!”

“Geez, chill out,” Kokichi says as he lifts Kiibo’s hands from his shoulders. “What’s done is done, I guess.”

“How are you so calm?!” Kiibo stares at him. “He’s probably going to kill us the first chance he gets! Aren’t you the slightest bit worried?”

“Psh, like there’s anything to be worried about,” Kokichi says. “It’s not like he can prove that we know anything. It’s his word against ours. Besides, freaking out isn’t going to get us anywhere now is it?”

Kiibo makes a helpless noise before groaning. “Ouma, I really don’t feel confident about any of this. M-Maybe we should give everyone a heads up about everything just in case-”

“The bear already said he’s going to go over the rules already and like I said before, there’s no point in telling everyone about your audio and Shirogane,” Kokichi says. “At least not yet anyway. If we start throwing accusations around too early then it’s going to backfire on us.”

“I...” Kiibo grimaces. “F-Fine...”

“Cheer up, Kiiboy!” Kokichi sighs. “C’mon, let’s go and find the gym. Hopefully we’ll get a better understanding of what’s going on after the bear explains things better.”

Kiibo hesitates before giving Kokichi a small nod. “Okay then. If that’s...what you think we should do then...”

“For a robot, you worry just a little bit too much,” Kokichi comments. “Now come on! I want to find out what’s going on!”

Kokichi spots the bear and Tsumugi talking just outside of the gym. The bear is holding what seems to be a...flashlight? Huh, interesting. Kokichi has no clue why the bear would need one in the first place but whatever, he’ll probably find out later.

When Tsumugi spots him she...waves him over? What the hell does she want?

“You go on ahead,” Kokichi tells Kiibo as they slowly approach Tsumugi and the gym doors. “I’ll follow you inside in just a second.”

“Are you sure?” Kiibo nervously wrings his hands together. “I don’t like the thought of leaving you alone with her.”

“Like Shirogane can do shit to me,” Kokichi responds, rolling his eyes. “Now be a good little robot and wait for me in the gym. I doubt I’m going to be too long.”

Kiibo sighs. “Okay, okay...just, please be careful.”

“I always am!”

Tsumugi gives him an amused look as he waits in front of her, both of them watching as Kiibo slips into the gym. The doors automatically swing shut behind him.

“I didn’t think you’d both get along so well so early on,” Tsumugi comments after a couple of seconds of awkward silence.

“I didn’t think my kidnapper would be an incompetent nerd but here we are,” Kokichi responds. “So...what do you want? Shouldn’t you be in the gym helping out your partner in crime?”

Tsumugi pauses before laughing. “No, Monokuma doesn’t need my help at the moment.”

“Oh? So you’re not even going to deny that you’re working with him?” Kokichi asks. “If you played your cards right then I would’ve eventually thought you were actually innocent, you know?”

“That’s bullshit and we both know it,” Tsumugi responds. Her eyes flicker towards the gym doors before back at him. “Everyone else is inside and we’re the only two out here.”

“Okay? And?” Kokichi taps his foot impatiently. “Seriously, what do you actually want?”

“It’s, ah, complicated,” Tsumugi admits. “I’m guessing you’ve noticed that things haven’t... exactly gone right for me or Monokuma.”

“Well duh, it’s obvious that your little kidnapping scheme isn’t going well at all,” Kokichi says. “Let me guess, you’re struggling and you want help from an actually competent person? I’m flattered but, well, the answer is no.”

“I don’t need your help with running my killing game,” Tsumugi says before rolling her eyes. “But, *ugh*, I do actually need your help with something else.”

“And why should I help you?”

“Because you helping me will benefit us both!” Tsumugi answers, clasping her hands together. “And if you help me now then Monokuma promises to postpone the killing game for a couple of days.”

“...did he now?” Kokichi murmurs. “And what exactly is it that you want me to do?”

“There’s been a couple of, ah, anomalies then just don’t make any sense and...” Tsumugi sighs, “Monokuma can’t figure out what’s going on and neither can I. I mean, usually we’d just reset the game but there’s this glitch-”

“Shirogane, what the hell are you on about?” Kokichi asks.

“Well Monokuma overheard you think that we’re in a simulation, which is right, by the way,” Tsumugi reveals way too casually. “I mean, I’d explain but there’s not exactly enough time so... yeah.”

Kokichi raises an eyebrow. “...so you want to run a killing game that doesn’t actually kill people?”

“I mean, people do die but don’t actually die,” Tsumugi says as if that makes perfect sense. “We’re in a simulation that is so advanced that we’re able to experience living the exact same way we would outside of a simulation too!”

“Yeah but why?” Kokichi blinks. “Why did you put us all in simulation just to get us to all kill each other?”

Tsumugi’s eyes twinkle. “That’s something I’ll answer another day.”

Kokichi frowns. “So what you’re saying is that we’re trapped in your simulation but instead of, you know, trying to figure out what’s actually going on you want to instead get one of your captors to do your dirty work for you and host your killing game?”

“I think that pretty much sums everything up,” Tsumugi says with a nod.

“Why?”

“Ugh, it’s always ‘why’ with you!” Tsumugi groans. “Wouldn’t you be upset if you spent so much time planning a killing game only for everything to go wrong? Of course I don’t want to ask for your help but Monokuma insisted that I ask because you, like, figure things out ridiculously quick.”

“Damn it, I knew my big brainy brain would get me into trouble one day,” Kokichi jokes before letting his smile fall. “Also the answer is no. I *don’t care* about your game, I care about getting out of here. What the hell is stopping me from going into the gym and telling everyone about what you’re up to?”

“Because...” Tsumugi suddenly smiles when a bright light flashes through the cracks of the doors. “Monokuma has just erased everyone’s memories of the last couple of hours.”

“*Hah?*”

Kokichi pushes past her and enters the gym and struggles to stop his jaw from falling to the floor. Everyone is currently sprawled out on the floor unconscious, well, *hopefully* unconscious. He spots Monokuma on a stage holding onto the same flashlight he was holding earlier.

“Why hello there,” Monokuma greets him with a wave. “You just missed out on all the fun!”

He doesn’t know whether to run or argue. Kokichi opens and closes his mouth as he looks at all the other Ultimates on the floor. “What the hell did you do?”

“Just tidying up some loose ends,” Monokuma answers. “Everyone was so scared when they found out about the rules and I couldn’t let them suffer so I made them forget all about them! And waking up here.”

He’s lying. He doesn’t care about them finding out about the rules. Kokichi narrows his eyes.

“And the truth?”

“No one was supposed to know about the rules yet,” Monokuma says. “I was willing to let some anomalies slide but after realising that a lot of things...don’t add up I decided that we need a fresh start.”

“So you can’t reset the game but you can reset our memories?” Kokichi asks.

“I’m hoping that Shirogane already told you that the game can’t be reset for some reason,” Monokuma says as Tsumugi makes her way into the gym. She stands next to Kokichi with a smile.

“Thankfully flashback lights can still be made so I made one to erase a couple of memories here and there.”

“Is this the first time you’ve done this then?” Kokichi asks. “Or have you fucked up so many times that you’ve forgotten to keep count?”

“Oh no, this is certainly the first time you’ve all been here,” Monokuma says hesitantly. “Probably.”

“Monokuma and I have noticed that there’s some things scattered around the school that don’t make any sense,” Tsumugi says. “And that there’s at least five students missing.”

“You mean the graduated students?” Kokichi frowns. “Well obviously they can’t be here if they’ve graduated.”

“But that can’t be right because there hasn’t been a killing game yet including all of you,” Monokuma says as he gestures around the room. “Well, or so I thought. I couldn’t help but overhear the audio Kiibo was playing earlier.”

Kokichi scowls. “How did you even hear that? I’d even checked-”

“There’s a lot more cameras following you around than you think,” Monokuma giggles. “Of course it would be boring if I said where the cameras are but, well, I’d be a lot more careful about saying stuff in the open from now on if I were you.”

What the fuck? Kokichi swallows. “Forget the cameras, why the hell did you not erase my memory along with everyone else’s?”

“Admittedly, you’re the last person I want to turn to for help but...” Monokuma sighs heavily. “Both Shirogane and I are stumped and she’s already messed up with you anyway.”

Tsumugi scrunches her face up. “It’s not my fault I thought Ouma had already introduced himself to Kiibo!”

“You should’ve just kept quiet!” Monokuma retorts. “Honestly...”

“Uh, hello? I still don’t know what you want from me?” Kokichi raises an eyebrow. “You do realise that I want to leave this place just as much as anyone else does, right? Shirogane has made it pretty obvious that the killing game is still going ahead, which I must say is pretty fucked up-”

“Nothing comes in the way of me and a killing game!” Monokuma declares with bright eyes. “It doesn’t matter if there’s sixteen or three of you, I’ll still make sure I’ll get at least a murder out of you all!”

Kokichi mentally notes that Monokuma and Tsumugi are clearly deranged. He pulls a face. “Okay, that’s cool and all but seriously, what the hell do you want me to do about all of this? I couldn’t care less about your game falling to pieces.”

“Well, think of it as a favour,” Monokuma says. “This killing game is going ahead no matter what you choose and wouldn’t you rather know a little more than everyone else and use that to your advantage?”

That...would be useful. “...go on...”

Monokuma smirks. “I want you to take a look around the school and try and figure out what

might've caused the simulation to glitch. If you're able to tell me why you think there's five students who have already graduated then I'll help you out when you need it and believe me, you're always going to need help in a killing game."

"You want me to figure out why there's five graduated students?" Kokichi blinks.

"If we know how they graduated then maybe that'll help me out with figuring out what the glitch is and how to stop it," Monokuma says.

"As despairing as it is to have my game go wrong from the start, well, I would've preferred to have more people here," Tsumugi admits as her eyes swirl. "And it almost brings me to tears that I have to rely on someone like you to help me! Isn't it so...awful! I love it!"

"If you say no then that's fine," Monokuma says before lifting his paw up and waving his flashlight around. "I'll just use this on you too! You'll never know that this conversation ever took place and will play the killing game regardless! I just thought that since so much has gone wrong already, well, one more little anomaly won't hurt."

"Ah..." Kokichi clasps his hands behind his back.

What a very...strange offer. There's alarm bells ringing in his head. This is obviously a trap of some sorts but, fuck, the alternative is that he wakes up in this school once again with absolutely no knowledge of what's going on. It was only coincidence that he found Kiibo's audio in the first place and no doubt Tsumugi and Monokuma are going to clean up the school of any evidence he can go through.

He's clearly stuck between a rock and a hard place. If he takes the deal then at least he'll have the knowledge of knowing how desperate Tsumugi and Monokuma are. He'll know that the game is barely hanging on by a thread and Monokuma and Tsumugi are all but forcing it to happen.

If he doesn't take the deal then he'll be on the same page as everyone else and...there's really no positives regarding that.

"Well?" Monokuma looks at him expectantly. "What's it going to be?"

"...fine. I'll help."

"Excellent!" Monokuma looks a little too excited.

"To be forced to rely on someone like Ouma for help..." Tsumugi giggles as her hands twitch. "This is going to be so exciting!"

Kokichi watches as she leans down and rummages through Kirumi's skirt pocket. "What are you doing?"

"Collecting the monopads, duh!" Tsumugi rolls her eyes. "There's no point letting everyone wake up with them if the rules are on them. Monokuma will hand them back out later!"

"So...you plan on letting everyone wake up here?" Kokichi asks.

Monokuma shakes his head. "No, no, no! You're both going to put everyone back accordingly."

"And once we've done that we'll wait for everyone to wake up," Tsumugi adds. "It's very important that we pretend that we've both just woken up too."

Monokuma smirks. “And it’ll make you look suspicious if you tell people that you know what’s going on so I wouldn’t recommend that.”

“I mean, you can if you want but both Monokuma and I will obviously deny everything,” Tsumugi says. “But you’re smart enough to know what you should and shouldn’t do anyway.”

Kokichi forces a smile. “Obviously.”

“Well then, what are you waiting for?” Monokuma asks. “Everyone is going to wake up shortly and I have a grand entrance to prepare for!”

The bear steps into the shadows and Kokichi barely manages to suppress a grimace as he looks around at his sleeping classmates. He pauses briefly before sighing and kneels down to pick up Kiibo under his armpits and starts to drag him to the same classroom that the two of them woke up in.

Chapter End Notes

Initially I planned to take a week or so off from writing after writing so much at once. At one point I was posting chapter after chapter after chapter and I think it eventually took its toll. I don't think I've ever experienced so much burnout before when it comes to writing and I decided I should take a break that ended up lasting several months.

I don't usually ask for comments but if you're still interested in this fic after so long or are a new reader and like what you've read so far I would really appreciate it if you left a comment saying you want to see more of this fic. I'm not as confident as I previously was with my writing and knowing that people are enjoying what I post would really help out in the long run. Thank you in advance! (Although don't feel obliged to comment either if you don't like to do that sort of thing, I rarely comment either since I'm so shyahaha.)

I can't promise that I'm going to update as frequently as I did during Kaede's loop but hopefully I won't take several months to post the next chapter either. I would like to see this fic getting finished though.

Sorry for the ramble. This is the only place aside from my tumblr where I can update everyone about the progress of this fic so I work with what I haveahaha. Thanks for reading!

Kokichi Ouma - Chapter 1 Part 3

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for the support on the last chapter! Ahaha I guess I just needed some encouragement. Also I want to thank xshinina who drew some amazing fanart for this fic!!! Please check it out if you all have the chance on their tumblr!

I hope you all enjoy this chapter!

Have a nice day!

Kokichi reintroduces himself once again to everyone and has to keep a steady poker face as everyone tries to figure out what the hell is going on. Tsumugi has decided that she's on some sort of mission to ruin his day even further since she won't leave him alone for even a second.

Like she had done last time, she'd burst into Kokichi and Kiibo's classroom and had started to do some ungodly wailing that made Kokichi wish he was deaf. Kiibo, of course, took pity on her and they had once again become a trio.

Kokichi, of course, eventually lost Kiibo to Miu because life fucking hates him. Tsumugi, of course, decided to stay with him because, as previously established, life fucking hates him.

They end up sitting around the same damn table in the dining room and it's a small blessing that Kirumi decides to clear up the table first and not make everyone lunch this time around because she's apparently woken up with a couple more brain cells than she did previously. He doesn't insert himself into the conversation that much since everyone is practically repeating themselves and not saying anything exceptionally smart so he decides that there's ample time for him to lean back on his chair and zone out.

Tsumugi occasionally elbows him with her tragically pointy elbows when no one is looking. She keeps mouthing to him that he should probably be listening in case someone miraculously says something helpful and each time she does he sends her the driest look he can muster.

Honestly, at this point all he can do is wait for Monokuma to show up so everyone is at least on the same page. He thought that Monokuma would've turned up to tell everyone by now about the killing game (he was certain that Monokuma must've lied about promising to delay the killing game but it seems he was wrong) and relish in everyone's distress but Monokuma is sure taking his sweet, sweet time. It doesn't help that Monokuma also failed to tell both Tsumugi and Kokichi when he was planning on returning.

So until Monokuma returns to ruin everyone's day, Kokichi waits in absolute boredom. Well...and also with a pinch of crippling anxiety because he's waiting for a fucking killing game to start and of course that is a reasonable reason to be just a little bit tense.

He wonders how hard Tsumugi would slap him if he just blurted out to everyone that hey, sorry to ruin this monotonous chat but something super duper bad is going to happen soon and most of you are probably going to die. Thankfully, Kokichi considers himself to be an absolute saint (as well as a top tier comedian) so he doesn't say anything just yet.

Of course he feels a slight tug of guilt for not warning everyone about the unfortunate predicament they're all going to end up in soon but he's at least ninety nine percent sure that Tsumugi will just pull out one of those weird flashback lights or whatever and restart the game again because she's a sore loser and a cheat. Honestly, *fuck* Tsumugi for being so thorough and desperate to have her game run smoothly. How *rude* of her.

It's even worse that she wants him to help her out too. Like, she's clearly got the wrong Ultimate title. Even giving her the honour of being the Ultimate Bitch is probably too kind. Besides, Kokichi is already on target when it comes to claiming that title for himself. He's very damn proud of himself.

What is she or Monokuma even expecting him to find anyway? It's not like he's as smart as they're hoping him to be. He just bullshits his way through theory after theory and people end up believing him because he's charismatic as fuck and speaks like he's always right. Monokuma and to a degree, Tsumugi, must think very highly of him for some reason to ask him for help.

Maybe Kokichi is an idiot for even agreeing to help out in the first place. Ugh, it's not like he wants to play a game where everyone is forced to play. Even the thought makes him feel sick. He knows for a fact that he only agreed to help so Monokuma wouldn't make him forget everything too and erase all of his progress.

Besides, if push comes to shove then he can just lie about anything he finds out. Like, fuck Monokuma and Tsumugi. Had they even thought about the fact that Kokichi could figure out what's going on and then say he has no clue? Maybe they did and he's feeling a little bit too confident right now but hey, he supposes things could be a little worse right now.

Tsumugi nudges him again and he raises an eyebrow at her. Can she just let him monologue dramatically and internally in peace? She tilts her head ever so slightly to the side and he follows her movements, only to notice that the entire table is looking at him. He blinks. Whoops.

"Are you done zoning out now?" Tenko asks, rolling her eyes. "Typical male, you were probably thinking about something inappropriate whilst we were all worrying, weren't you?"

"Lay off him, Chabashira. He's been quiet ever since we all woke up," Kiibo says. Ah, that's right. Kokichi didn't roast Kiibo like he had done the first time. He'd just introduced himself before Tsumugi had burst his eardrums. Kiibo lowers his voice. "I think he's shy."

Kokichi dies inside and before he can even defend himself, Gonta unhelpfully speaks up. "There no need to be shy! Everyone here really friendly!"

Ryoma side eyes Miu. "Are you sure about that?"

"And what the fuck is that supposed to mean?" Miu slams her chest with her fist. "I'm God's gift to this world! You should all be paying to even look at me!"

Kaito blatantly ignores her. "Kiibo, it's not manly to call a man shy!"

"And what's gender got to do with being shy?" Tenko hisses. "Stop turning everything into stereotypes!"

"I think we should all calm down," Kirumi suggests calmly. "We're not going to get anywhere if we're all arguing with each other."

"It's not like we've gotten very far anyway!" Angie cheerfully says and Kokichi almost gets whiplash from how she can say such a negative thing in such a positive way. "Angie thinks we

should just, like, leave.”

“I don’t think we’re going to leave so easily,” Korekiyo says in a tone that makes him sound as creepy as he looks. “We’ve clearly been trapped here for a reason. Have you seen the glass wall outside?”

“Well it’s not like the wall was put up whilst we were unconscious, right? Something like that would take hours or days even,” Tsumugi says.

“If that’s the case then there must be an exit hidden somewhere,” Kirumi says as she puts a hand to her chin. “I suggest that we start looking for it as soon as possible.”

Kokichi’s eyes flicker over to Tsumugi. She shoots him a smug look. Ah, so it’s most likely that there’s no exit then. He pulls a face.

“We should split up into groups, Tenko suggests that we split into groups of boys and girls!” Tenko declares before pumping a fist. “Tenko swears that she’s going to keep all of the girls safe!”

“But isn’t that a little…dangerous?” Kaito asks, hesitating when Tenko glares at him with such intensity that Kokichi can feel Kaito’s fear second hand. “I-I’m just saying that-”

“Are you saying girls can’t protect themselves?” Tenko sneers. “Tenko pities you. You’re so old fashioned that Tenko is surprised that you’re not hobbling around with a walking frame.”

“Even so, maybe we should just stick together as one big group?” Tsumugi suggests quietly. “You know, in case we find something dangerous?”

“I’m confident that there’s nothing too dangerous around here,” Kirumi reassures her and Kokichi tries very hard not to snort. “I think splitting up might be for the best since we’ll be able to cover more ground. I suggest that we all explore and return here after an hour to discuss any findings.”

Kokichi thinks it’s absolutely hysterical that Tsumugi clearly doesn’t like this idea since it means she can’t keep her stupid little eyes on him. What’s better is that she can’t even argue since it’ll make her look weird since everyone else looks seemingly satisfied with Kirumi’s plan.

“How about the girls explore the inside of the building whilst we explore around outside?” Kiibo suggests. “Since there’s one more of us and more land to cover, I do think that would be the smartest option.”

“I really think that we should-” Tsumugi’s timid voice is easily talked over.

“I agree,” Kirumi says. “Very well then. We should start exploring now so we don’t waste too much daylight. I’m fearing the sun is going to set soon anyway.”

Tsumugi squawks out a couple of barely heard protests. Kokichi gives her a small wave with his fingers as Tenko mistakes Tsumugi’s cries of dismay for worry and drags her out of the dining room with an arm around her shoulder.

When they leave, Kaito’s shoulders slump with relief. “Remind me to never get on Chabashira’s bad side again.”

“You were saying some very stereotypical things, Momota,” Korekiyo points out, closing his eyes. “I’m more than confident that the girls can look after themselves. After all, they all have such wonderful talents.”

Kiibo nods eagerly and Kokichi is suddenly hit with this pang of longing. Damn, even if he starts bullying Kiibo now it's just not going to feel the same. How devastating. It's a tragedy really. "I'm especially excited to get to know Iruma better! She said that she wants to give me upgrades one day!"

"But Kiibo fine just how he is!" Gonta responds brightly. "Gonta never seen robot before because Gonta spent a lot of time living in a forest! Gonta not really understand technology well but thinks Kiibo looks extra cool!"

It's lucky that Kiibo is a robot because if he had the ability to form tears then the room would be flooded. "T-That's the nicest thing someone has ever said to me!"

"Aren't we getting off track here?" Kaito sighs as he puts a hand on his hip. "C'mon guys, we don't want the girls to show us up now do we! If we come back empty handed then Chabashira might kick my ass!"

"Chabashira is the Ultimate Aikido Master, yes? I'm fairly certain that aikido isn't used for violence so I'm sure you'll be fine in that aspect," Korekiyo says as he rubs his chin. "However, on a personal level I'm fairly certain that Chabashira will kick your ass anyway."

Ryoma grumbles as he pulls on his hat. "We're all getting distracted again."

"That's right!" Kaito flashes everyone a smile as he pounds his fists together. "It's time for Team Kaito to move out!"

"Uh, why are we called Team Kaito?" Kiibo rolls his eyes. "Shouldn't it be like Team Boys or something?"

"That sounds childish," Kaito retorts. "At least pick something manlier, like Team Men!"

"I'm in Hell," Ryoma mutters under his breath.

Kaito guides everyone out of the backdoor and outside. The sky is currently a warm orange and the sun is starting to slowly set. Kokichi reaches up and uses his hand to protect his eyes. Wow, it sure has been a long day. He was kind of hoping that he'd be out of here by now.

Kokichi places himself at the back of the group as Kaito marches everyone around. They don't really do a lot of searching, more so pointing out the obvious and mild bickering that Kokichi would've certainly inserted himself into if the situation was different.

He just feels a little bit uncomfortable, that's all. It feels like there's something pressing down on his chest as he looks as he watches everyone talk to each other. Some of them or maybe even *all* of them are going to die soon. They're going to kill each other for Monokuma's amusement. Kokichi briefly thinks about giving everyone a heads up but he has no clue if Monokuma is listening or not.

He's not seen any hidden cameras around but that didn't stop Monokuma from knowing where he and Kiibo had been earlier today and knew exactly what they had been talking about. He licks his lips. If he says something now then what's stopping Monokuma from restarting the game again?

Okay, so maybe he's selfish for keeping so much to himself but he's trying his best. Sure, maybe everything he's doing is to benefit himself but on the other hand it's not like he's going to *completely* screw everyone over. A leader knows when to keep quiet and when to admit defeat. Sure, he's sort of working with the enemy at the moment but when the killing game does start won't *everyone* technically be his enemy?

And yeah, call him a coward but he doesn't plan on killing anyone with his own two hands either. Murder is unforgivable. He quite frankly doesn't care that in order to leave he might have to kill someone. He knows that the killing game is already not running smoothly so if he's lucky then maybe he can find some sort of loophole and get the game stopped before something bad really does happen.

The best way to keep himself safe for now is to just keep his head down and make sure he doesn't make himself stand out. If the game ends up happening then he doesn't want a target on his back.

He's even thought about how to deal with Monokuma and Tsumugi too. He's not stupid, he knows that the moment he figures out what's going on and tells them both then he'll be on Monokuma's hit list. Monokuma will *cheat* and find a way for him to get killed off. He needs to drag out Monokuma's request for as long as he can without making it too obvious that he's doing so.

It's just, *ugh*, Monokuma and Tsumugi clearly have some sort of silent agreement going on which includes Tsumugi keeping an eye on him. Does she really think he's dense enough to screw himself over? He's not going to say shit until it's absolutely necessary.

He rests his hands behind his head with a sigh. He has a huge headache and would love nothing more than to go to sleep right now. If he's lucky then he'll wake up from whatever hellish nightmare this is.

Actually, that's probably not what's going to happen though. Kiibo's audio made it painfully obvious that everyone has been here before. If he falls asleep or worse, *dies*, then he's probably going to end up waking up inside of that stupid classroom again. It's migraine inducing how annoying the whole situation is. If only he had more to work with, like, maybe a memory or two of a previous killing game.

He doesn't realise how zoned out he actually is until Gonta of all people manages to sneak up on him. Well, he probably didn't sneak up on him since the big guy literally slowed down enough so he was walking side by side with Kokichi but Kokichi jumps all the same when Gonta speaks to him.

"Ouma have big frown on his face! He not worried about anything, is he?" Gonta asks curiously. "Because Gonta don't think there anything to worry about!"

Kokichi quietly acknowledges his words before giving the gentle giant a small smile. "Is that so?"

Gonta nods. "Yep, Gonta thinks everything is going to be okay."

"Well good for you, Gonta," Kokichi says.

Gonta clearly misses Kokichi's sarcasm and smiles. "Yes, it is very good! Gonta tries to always find the positive in each situation! We all may be stuck here but at least we have each other!"

Barf. Ugh, Gonta is one of those people then. It reminds him of what Kiibo had said earlier, about how he wanted to be friends with everyone. How pitiful. Kokichi can easily see Gonta being manipulated in some way later on because of his kind nature. He just hopes Gonta doesn't suffer for too long when he inevitably gets tricked into doing something horrible.

The entomologist is clearly waiting for a response as he looks at Kokichi expectantly. "Yeah, at least we have each other I guess..."

"Ouma should join in conversation more," Gonta suddenly says. "Maybe you can help find exit? You do look very smart."

“That’s because I am,” Kokichi responds as he readjusts his hands behind his head. “And I personally think we’re just wasting our time. It’s not like we’re going to find an exit so easily and even if we do, I bet we’ll end up finding a locked door or something.”

“Then Gonta break door down!” Gonta says fiercely as he clenches his fists. “Gonta may not be very smart but Gonta is very strong! Gonta think if we need to then he can break down anything in our way!”

He’s probably not wrong. Gonta’s muscles are huge.

“Ah, but what if we find something that is unbreakable?” Kokichi presses. “What then?”

Gonta frowns as he rubs his chin. “Hmm, Gonta not think that far ahead. Maybe Ouma overthinking everything. There no point worrying about things that haven’t happened yet, right?”

What a strangely insightful thing for someone like Gonta to say. Kokichi hums. “Maybe you’re right, Gonta.”

“Gonta hope he right too because Gonta have family to get back to,” Gonta admits bashfully. “Um, Gonta have two families to see actually!”

“Oh?” Kokichi raises an eyebrow.

Gonta looks to the side. “Gonta have human family and Gonta also have family from forest! He was brought up by, ah, wolves.”

The fact that Gonta refuses to look him in the eyes is rather curious. He’s lying about something. “Is that so?”

“Yes! Gonta got lost one day from human family and he was found by wolves,” Gonta quickly says. “Wolves kept him warm and safe and brought Gonta up as one of own! Gonta owes them a lot and visits lots so they don’t forget about Gonta!”

“But you found your human family in the end, right?”

“Oh yes!” Gonta nods cheerfully. “It took lots and lots of years but Gonta reunite with human family! Gonta loves both families equally but they don’t really get along well which make Gonta sad.”

“Well it sure is lucky that you have two families then,” Kokichi says. “If you fall out with one then you at least have another family to fall back on.”

Gonta gives him a horrified look. “Gonta would never fall on family because Gonta is big and would crush them!”

“That’s not what I...” Kokichi sighs. “Never mind.”

“Gonta never do bad things because Gonta trying to be gentleman!” Gonta explains. “If Gonta shows human family that he can be a gentleman then maybe they will accept his other family!”

“I see, I see.”

“So Gonta want to be a gentleman by finding a way out of here!” Gonta continues excitedly. “Gentleman always do right thing to help everyone so Gonta really want to find exit!”

“I think we all want to find an exit,” Kokichi tells him. He clears his throat. “Shouldn’t you start looking around more thoroughly instead of talking to me? You’re never going to find an exit if you keep this up.”

“Oh! Ouma right,” Gonta says. “Ouma should come along with Gonta and look! The more people looking then the quicker we find exit!”

“I *am* looking,” Kokichi reassures him. “But I think you should look somewhere else so more ground is covered.”

Gonta hesitates. “But Ouma look so lonely walking on his own.”

“If I wanted to walk with people then I would,” Kokichi responds. “Now clear off, I’ve got a headache.”

“Oh, okay...”

Gonta looks a little disheartened and he catches up with everyone else to tell them he’s going to search around the walls. He figures he should feel bad but he genuinely does still have a headache and isn’t in the mood to humour Gonta and his tall tales.

They end up circling back to the school and check the boiler room around the back. The room smells musty and looks damp. Kokichi sighs and wraps his arms around himself as he realises how cold the room is. There must be a draft somewhere.

Kaito ends up finding a hole in the ground at the same time Kokichi spots a manhole cover and puts two and two together. Sheesh, it’s lucky that no one actually ended up falling down into the hole. Kokichi peers down at it and wrinkles his nose. It looks like it goes down pretty far.

“Well, we better go and take a look,” Kaito declares as he starts to climb down. “After this we’ll tell the girls...that, um, we didn’t exactly find anything.”

“Maybe we’ll find something down in the hole?” Kiiibo says.

“At best we’ll find some tunnels perhaps,” Korekiyo responds. “Although if we do then going through them might be our best bet of getting out of here.”

Kokichi watches as everyone climbs into the hole one by one. When Kiiibo starts to climb inside, he gives Kokichi an expectant look. “Um, are you not going to join us?”

“I don’t want to get dirty,” Kokichi lies as he turns his head to the side. The truth is he’d rather die than climb down because the hole isn’t exactly that big and he’d right not navigate tight spaces thank you very much. What if something happens and the walls collapse? Then everyone will get crushed and die and yuck, he hates just even thinking about it.

Kiiibo rolls his eyes. “I’m pretty sure getting dirty shouldn’t be your biggest concern at the moment.”

“I’m a germaphobe,” Kokichi continues. “Besides, we don’t need six people searching down the same hole.”

“Whilst that is true...” Kiiibo pauses. “You shouldn’t wait up here alone.”

“What? Is some big scary monster going to attack me?” Kokichi rolls his eyes. “Just go down already, I doubt that there’s anything important down there anyway.”

He quickly eats his words as Kaito starts to shout. “Holy shit, I think I found an exit!”

Kokichi groans as Kiibo shoots him a smug look. “Are you sure about that, Ouma?”

Wow, getting reset must’ve made Kiibo grow some huge robotic balls or something. Kokichi pokes his tongue at him but firmly crosses his arms. “I’m still not coming down. Momota might be wrong for all we know.”

“Are you not even the slightest bit curious though?” Kiibo asks.

Well duh, of course he is but right now his body is having a very inconvenient reaction to being near such a tight space. “If there’s *definitely* an exit then I’ll come down. Until then I’m staying up here.”

“Fine, fine...” Kiibo gives him one last look before climbing down.

Kokichi barely manages to hear Kiibo explain why Kokichi isn’t with them. He rolls his eyes as Gonta offers to come back up to wait with him but sighs in relief when Kaito insists that they follow whatever clue he’s found.

He slumps against the wall and slides down, deciding to rest for a couple of moments. He’s so tired and a little bit dizzy. When his stomach grumbles he finally remembers that he hasn’t exactly eaten all day but the thought of putting food in his mouth at the moment leaves him feeling even more light headed. Maybe he’ll have a mooch around the school tonight or tomorrow and find something that looks like it hasn’t been tampered with.

Anyway, enough about that. Kokichi is more curious about his new irrational...fear of tight spaces. He’s never been claustrophobic up until now. However, after realising that he’d have to climb down into something so tight he just...couldn’t. It’s really weird but Kokichi wonders if this new fear is somehow linked to the glitch. Did the glitch mess with people too as well as the game itself? He’ll have to do some investigating later.

From the corner of his eye he sees Monokuma walk into the room casually and it makes Kokichi’s blood boil. He wants to scold him but instead he gives the bear a wave because he doesn’t want Monokuma knowing he’s a little more than frazzled at the moment.

“And where have you been?” Kokichi asks quietly so he doesn’t draw attention to himself.

“Just sorting a couple of things out,” Monokuma responds. “Why are you alone?”

“I didn’t want to crawl into some shitty hole,” Kokichi responds with a sniff. “Anyway, why haven’t you revealed yourself yet? I thought you were kidding about pausing the game?”

Monokuma chuckles. “Well aren’t you a cruel one? Are you that desperate to see everyone’s faces when they realise they’re going to have to kill each other?”

“Obviously not,” Kokichi says as he rolls his eyes. “But I was under the impression that things would be moving a lot...quicker than this.”

“Oh believe me, I would love nothing more than to ruin everyone’s day,” Monokuma admits before turning a shade of blue. “But there’s still some things I need to look at. I’d also rather not start the game until everyone is here too...”

“Well you could’ve said something earlier, you know? All this waiting around is booooring,” Kokichi complains.

“Shut it, I know you’re secretly relieved,” Monokuma responds. “Anyway, have you figured out anything yet?”

“Of course not,” Kokichi says. “It’s only been a couple of hours and I can’t exactly leave without looking suspicious. You’re going to have to wait for some answers.”

“Boo hoo hoo,” Monokuma fakes a cry. “How sad.”

“You know, you could always just cancel the killing game and let everyone know what’s going on,” Kokichi suggests. “I mean, what’s the point in having a game if not everyone’s around to enjoy it?”

“Don’t say things I want to agree with,” Monokuma huffs. “As much as I want to restart the game, I don’t think that’s possible. I can restart everyone’s memories here all I want but it doesn’t change the fact I’m still missing five students!”

“Then maybe keep a better eye on them then,” Kokichi retorts.

Monokuma grumbles. “Well it’s not *my* fault they didn’t even load in in the first place. Honestly, how rude of them to miss my killing game.”

“Maybe you’re just the rude one forgetting about *their* killing games,” Kokichi says as he pulls a face. “You already know from Kiibo’s audio that we’ve probably been here before.”

“Well I know that, duh,” Monokuma mutters. “I just think that the missing students have some neck in having a killing game and then making me forget all about it! It’s so rude! It’s so despairing! I couldn’t be more proud!”

Kokichi blinks at the sudden one eighty but doesn’t care to bring it up. “Well it’s not just you doesn’t remember, you know? No one here has a clue what’s going on.”

“Well hurry up and figure out why,” Monokuma complains. “Honestly, I ask for one small thing…”

“You’re the one who managed to create a simulation to trap us all here, if there’s anyone here who should be able to figure out what’s going on then it’s you,” Kokichi points out. “You’re giving me the impression that you’re a lot less smarter than you want us to believe.”

Monokuma growls. “And you have some neck too! How dare you bully your poor old headteacher like this? I’m trying to give everyone the best experience possible, you know?”

“I don’t think any of us literally asked to be put in a killing game,” Kokichi responds.

Monokuma chuckles. “Is that what you think?”

Kokichi pauses. “Am I wrong?”

“I don’t know. Are you?”

“Nooo?”

Monokuma smiles at him before sighing. “Well as much fun as this was, I actually do have things I need to do. Just make sure you stay on your best behaviour whilst I’m gone.”

“Wait, when are you actually going to like, reveal yourself though?” Kokichi quickly asks. “I’m being serious when I said all this waiting around is boring.” That’s a lie, the longer Monokuma

takes, the better.

“Cool your jets, kid,” Monokuma says. “You can’t rush perfection.”

Kokichi would roll his eyes but he’s pretty sure if he does one more time then his eyes will fall out of his head. He watches silently as Monokuma dashes out of the room, the timing very convenient as only a minute later, Kaito’s head pops up from the hole.

“Did you find an exit then?”

Kaito frowns. “We found this huge door at the end of this strange tunnel but it’s locked up tight. Even Gonta couldn’t pry it open.”

“Aw man, who would’ve guessed,” Kokichi murmurs.

“You should’ve come with us,” Kaito continues as he pulls himself up. “Maybe you would’ve seen something we didn’t.”

“You said you found a tunnel, right? I’m pretty sure you all saw everything that needed to be seen.”

“But still, we need to work together from now on,” Kaito says. “I don’t get why you’re so reluctant to work with everyone but you’re not helping anyone by ignoring us all.”

“Did Kiibo not explain that I really didn’t want to go down the hole?” Kokichi sighs. He really can’t be bothered to deal with a lecture from Kaito right now.

“He said you didn’t want to get dirty, which really isn’t a good enough excuse, man,” Kaito says. “Look, I don’t know what your deal is but can you at least try and act like you care? We’ve all been kidnapped and we need to stick together.”

“Fine, fine!” Kokichi holds his hands up in surrender before pulling himself up from the floor.

Kaito once again leads the group and takes everyone back to the dining room. The girls are already inside of the dining room and all of them bar Tsumugi looks rather upset. Geez, Tsumugi really should put on some sort of act. She’s lucky no one is calling her out for looking so pleased.

It’s Kiibo who informs the group about the tunnel and the huge locked door. Tsumugi looks rather surprised at the information.

“Was it easy to get through the tunnels?” Tsumugi asks curiously.

“I mean, it looked like there were some traps but nothing really happened whilst we walked through,” Kaito explains. “It was kind of weird to be honest.”

“There were cages dangling from the ceiling,” Korekiyo adds. “It was certainly an interesting experience.”

“C-Cages you say?” Tenko shudders. “Why would there be cages lying around? That’s super creepy.”

“Maybe that’s how we were brought in?” Angie suggests, once again sounding way too happy. “Maybe we were captured and put in cages and brought here?”

“I think I’d remember being put into a cage,” Kiibo responds with a grim smile.

“Did girls find anything weird too?” Gonta asks.

Kirumi shakes her head with an unsatisfied expression. “No. All we found were a couple of classrooms, a library, a games room paired with a cinema room, a warehouse and what seems to be a storage room perhaps.”

“So the only exit we have at the moment is the one we found,” Ryoma says with a frown. “Which isn’t very helpful since we can’t exactly open the door.”

“Perhaps we should search for a key to open it then?” Kirumi suggests.

Kaito hums. “It would have to be a key card since I didn’t see a keyhole anywhere.”

“The door did have a very sci-fi look to it,” Korekiyo admits. “It didn’t exactly match the interior of this school. This building is very run down and looks abandoned but the tunnels look like they’ve been given a recent upgrade.”

“How strange...” Angie bobs her head from side to side. “Angie is very confused!”

“Does it fucking matter what the door looks like?” Miu groans. “What matters is getting it open! If we can’t find the damn key card for it then I’ll make something that’ll open the door myself!”

“You will?” Gonta’s eyes shine. “Wow! Iruma amazing!”

“Hah, well I am the one and only gorgeous girl genius!” Miu proudly smirks. “I’m sure there must be somewhere in this shithole that has stuff I can use to make something.”

“Actually, we did find a building outside that’s full of scrap material and tools,” Kiibo tells her. “I’m sure there might be something in there that’ll help you.”

Miu looks like she’s seconds away from drooling all over the floor. “Why the fuck did no one tell me this earlier?!”

“Because it didn’t seem important?” Kaito retorts. “But if you could make something that can help us then that would be really great actually!”

“I’ll have to see the door myself first to see what I’m working with,” Miu says as she starts to pace. She seems surprisingly motivated. “Oi, Kiibo! Take me to where this fucking door is! I’ll find a way to blast it open!”

“But...it’s getting dark out,” Kiibo says slowly. “And I think we’ve all had a long day. As much as I would like to leave right now...shouldn’t we all rest and continue with what we’re doing tomorrow?”

“Maybe that is for the best,” Kirumi says. “I’ve not seen anything that might become a threat towards us so we should be safe if we sleep here for just one night. I understand that everyone wants to leave but we shouldn’t exhaust ourselves either.”

“I’m fairly certain I saw a dormitory outside too,” Korekiyo adds. “So there should be beds for us all to sleep in.”

Tenko pulls a face. “But shouldn’t we get out of here as soon as we can? Someone clearly put us here! What if they come back tomorrow?”

There’s a pause before Tsumugi speaks up. “Then at least we can confront them during the day

when it's light out. I don't like the idea of having to do things in the dark because it makes everything seem a little scarier."

Kokichi is in disbelief when everyone eats up her bullshit excuse and decide to rest for the night. What are they all doing? It's literally common sense not to put yourself into a vulnerable position whilst in a situation like this. He wants to rip his hair out as everyone heads outside together to go into the dormitory.

At least they're sceptical when they see the portraits of themselves placed above each door.

"Well someone clearly expected us here," Korekiyo murmurs quietly as he finds his own portrait.

"I wonder who the other people are? There's a couple of faces I don't recognise," Kiibo adds as he looks up at a picture of a blond girl wearing pink. "And why doesn't this room have a door?"

Kokichi peers inside and sees that Monokuma has probably cleaned the room up since the whiteboard is missing and there's no bloodstain on the floor. He sighs internally. How does the bear expect him to get anything figured out if he's going to go around cleaning up evidence?

"Maybe they just didn't want a door?" Angie suggests.

"They're not even here anyway," Ryoma points out. "So what does it matter?"

Kokichi can't help but feel a little bit envious as everyone manages to get into their rooms with ease, some of them even conveniently finding bedroom keys inside of their pockets. Everyone claims they had no clue how the keys got there in the first place, which Kokichi believes but just can't help but find weird. Where is his key? He wants his own room too dammit.

He ends up standing outside of his room looking like a weirdo as everyone else heads off to bed. He plans to just use a hair clip to unlock the door himself but finds it's more convenient to do that sort of thing in private since he doesn't want anyone asking questions about how he knows how to pick locks in the first place. It's a tedious conversation that he's sick of having.

When the last door closes he kneels down on one key and pulls a clip from his hair. However, he hears the sound of a door handle being pressed down and he rolls his eyes as someone leaves their room for whatever reason. He's not even surprised when he turns around to see Tsumugi beckoning him to follow her outside.

So much for her being scared to do things in the dark.

Once they're both outside she lets out a long and suffering sigh. "Ugh, things are so boring right now! I wish Monokuma would hurry up and start the game already."

Wow, if she's brought him outside only to complain then he's leaving. He puts a hand above his eyes and starts to peer around dramatically.

"Um, what are you doing?" Tsumugi asks.

"Oh, you know. Looking for someone who asked."

Tsumugi scowls. "You don't have to be so rude."

"Well on a scale of some light hearted banter and trapping people in a random school and forcing them to kill each other, I think I have the higher ground here," Kokichi responds.

“Yeah well...” Tsumugi sniffs. “There’s not even going to be a killing game at this rate! Who cares if some things have gone wrong? I want to play already!”

“Have you seriously just brought me out here to complain?” Kokichi asks. “Because I seriously couldn’t care less about anything you say at the moment.”

“I actually wanted to bring you somewhere,” Tsumugi admits with a sneer. “There’s nowhere really private for us to talk apart from one specific room and you’ll never find it without my help.”

“Oh? Does Shirogane have a secret lair?” Kokichi raises an eyebrow.

“Yeah, something like that,” Tsumugi responds. “In any other circumstances I would’ve never let anyone know about it but since it’s you and...we’re technically partners in crime now-”

“Woah, woah, woah! We are so *not* partners in crime!” Kokichi pouts. “We just have to work together for a little while, unfortunately. We’re reluctant co-workers at best.”

“Reluctant is too kind of a word! Ugh, I can’t believe I’m being forced to work with one of my own captives for such a stupid reason,” Tsumugi mutters. “I don’t get why Monokuma is so pedantic about making sure everything is perfect. If anything I think our situation is very despairing and that’s the whole point of hosting a killing game!”

Kokichi pulls a face. “You’re only making us kill each other because you want to watch us to despair? Ouch, that’s a little childish don’t you think?”

“C-Childish?” Tsumugi splutters. “What’s childish about wanting to see people suffer?”

“It’s such an overdone reason when it comes to people justifying their bad actions,” Kokichi admits. “Only children’s stories use that sort of excuse to develop their villains. Ooo, look at me! I’m super evil and want to watch the world burn because I’m bad and edgy!”

“You’re such a dick,” Tsumugi hisses. “And you’re wrong! Of course there’s other reasons why I want this killing game so much too!”

“Oh? Please, do explain.”

“Why should I?” Tsumugi grumbles. “You’re clearly just going to mock me if I do.”

“Then stop being so mockable,” Kokichi tells her.

Tsumugi’s cheeks turn an angry red. “Ugh, just, *ugh*. Come on, follow me before I change my mind and beg Monokuma to just kill you now.”

“But that’s against the ruuules.”

“As far as I’m concerned there are no rules whilst there’s no killing game,” Tsumugi responds bitterly.

She stomps into the school and towards the bathrooms. Specifically the girl’s bathroom. Kokichi instantly slows down. “Woah, woah, woah! Are you trying to get me killed? As soon as I step inside then Chabashira’s secret sixth sense for knowing when a male is being degenerate is going to activate and she’ll punt me into the stratosphere!”

“No she won’t. Stop being such a baby,” Tsumugi responds as she opens the door and waits for him expectantly. “C’mon, hurry up!”

Kokichi wrinkles his nose. “Why is your secret lair inside of a bathroom anyway? Seems pretty unhygienic to me.”

“It’s not unhygienic!” Tsumugi snaps and drags him inside.

He laughs at her as he stumbles inside, quickly balancing himself as she storms over to a wall for some reason and starts to press down on some tiles. His laughter turns into uncomfortable giggles as something suddenly feels wrong. He clears his throat.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m opening up the wall,” Tsumugi answers. She must press down on something right as the wall in front of her suddenly swings backwards, revealing a very hidden hallway. “C’mon, let’s go already...wait, *yuck!* What the hell?”

Kokichi creeps forward slowly and peers over Tsumugi’s shoulder and freezes.

The hallway that stretches out in front of him is very clearly splattered with dried up blood. It’s all over the floor and walls and it makes Kokichi gag. He stumbles back as Tsumugi continues to stare in awe.

“Oh wow, I wonder what caused this?” Tsumugi ponders out loud a little too excitedly. “I wonder if we’re going to find a body? Oh, oh! Maybe that’s where the missing students are! Maybe they’ve already killed each other-” She turns to look at him. “Hey, what’s your problem?”

He’s not sure himself to be honest, only that there’s his horrible, ugly sensation flooding through his veins and making his bones feel heavy. He needs to leave. He needs to get out of here right *now* because, because, because if he doesn’t then he’s going to die. He’s going to die. Tsumugi is going to kill him if he stays here because she’s planned this all along, hasn’t she?

Tsumugi takes a step forward and Kokichi bolts before she can say anything else, dodging her hand as she reaches out to stop him. The bathroom door slams against the wall as he pushes it open. He runs and runs and runs until he finds an exit because he has to leave. He has to leave before she kills him again because, because, because, because, because...

...again?

He’s outside now. He nearly falls down the stairs as he stumbles away from the school backwards, not wanting to keep his eyes off it just in case Tsumugi had decided to follow him. He takes a couple of steps backwards and...breathes.

He feels disgustingly clammy and wipes his forehead with the back of his hand all the while continuing to keep an eye on the school. He really should go somewhere else, somewhere safe. He can probably pick his door open and lock it again from the inside but what if Tsumugi has his key? He runs a hand through his hair in frustration.

Then, he gets the second biggest scare of his life as something taps his shoulder. He spins around violently and stumbles backwards as he spots Kaito, his hand still hovering at Kokichi’s shoulder height.

“Holy shit man,” Kaito says. “What’s your problem?”

“What are you doing out here?” Kokichi instantly asks. He must’ve just come out or something because he definitely wasn’t out here when both he and Tsumugi were out before.

Kaito raises an eyebrow. "I couldn't sleep so I thought I'd do some light exercise. What are you doing out here?"

"I..." Kokichi pauses. "I decided to go on a little walk, that's all."

"Really?" Kaito looks him up and down. "What the hell made you run out of the building like that? I thought you were being chased for a second."

"You saw that?" Kokichi feels the tips of his ears burn in embarrassment.

"More so I heard you," Kaito admits. "Seriously, is something actually after you?"

"Would I be standing around talking to you if there was?" Kokichi fires back. He doubts Tsumugi is going to show herself now that Kaito is outside.

Kaito frowns. "Seriously, what's your problem? I'm just checking to see that you're okay, which you're clearly not."

"I'm *fine*," Kokichi hisses.

"You're shaking," Kaito argues and Kokichi blinks before slowly looking down at his hands which are indeed shaking. He shoves them into his armpits with a grumble. "Listen man, I don't know what your issue is but you've been acting weird all day."

"I mean I personally find it weird how you're all acting like nothing bad is going to happen after being kidnapped," Kokichi responds. "It's like you're all incredibly dumb or incredibly naïve."

Kaito stares at him. "Do you actually think I'm not worried? Of course I am! That doesn't mean I have to mope around though! Have some respect for yourself!"

"I'm not moping around you idiot!" Kokichi narrows his eyes. "Just because I've not been as dramatic as the rest of you doesn't mean I haven't been trying to find a way out either. I just think you're all being a little too optimistic at the moment, that's all."

"Hah? And what's that supposed to mean?" Kaito asks.

"There's no way we're going to get that door open," Kokichi says. "And I doubt Iruma is going to make something that's going to help either."

"She's the Ultimate Inventor, of course she'll be able to make something!" Kaito glares at him. "At least try to be optimistic!"

"No, I think I'd rather be realistic," Kokichi responds. "And even if she does make something, what's stopping our captors from stopping us, hmm?"

"If they wanted to stop us then they would've stopped us by now," Kaito answers. "Quit overthinking everything. We're getting out of here tomorrow and that's that."

"Well if that's what you want to believe then go right on ahead," Kokichi says as he pushes past the astronaut. "It's your funeral."

"Now hold on just a moment!" Kaito follows him. "Can you stop being an asshole for just a second and think about what you're saying? Seriously, it's almost like you've given up already!"

"Oh I've certainly not given up," Kokichi says. "But I just think you're all naïve to think that we're getting out of here so easily."

“You say that but I bet you weren’t out for just some walk,” Kaito suddenly says. “I bet you were looking for another exit, weren’t you?!”

“Whatever you say, Momo-chan.”

“Momo-chan?!”

Kokichi accidentally lets a snort slip out at Kaito’s very over the top reaction. “What? Do you not like the nickname?”

“Of course I don’t!” Kaito huffs. “It’s not manly at all!”

“I know, right? It’s so cute and warm,” Kokichi says. “So it definitely suits you!”

“I’m neither cute nor warm! I’m manly and cool!” Kaito responds as he puffs out his chest. “So quit screwing around!”

In that moment Kokichi realises that his hands have finally stopped shaking. He slips them from where he was crushing them and lets them dangle by his waist. Really, he ought to thank Kaito for the distracting conversation but that would only inflate his already humongous ego.

“Fine, fine!” Kokichi holds his hands up in defeat. “You’re manly and cool! I was wrong!”

“Damn straight!” Kaito nods in satisfaction before sighing, running a hand through his hair. “But seriously, what spooked you so bad before? You didn’t find anything that’s going to cause problems for everyone did you?”

Kokichi swallows before laughing. “Psh, no! I just got distracted, that’s all.”

“You were shaking,” Kaito responds. “Don’t lie to me.”

“I’m nooot!” Kokichi sticks his tongue out. “So just drop it, okaaaay?”

“...why are you like this?”

“Huh? Like what?”

“This!” Kaito responds as he gestures up and down Kokichi’s entire body. Okay, *rude*. “Quit being so stubborn!”

“Maybe you should quit thinking I have a problem when I don’t,” Kokichi says. “You’re being very presumptuous, Momota.”

“And you’re being very awkward.”

“I must admit it’s one of my weaker traits,” Kokichi says sadly.

Kaito narrows his eyes. “I really don’t get you at all.”

“Excellent!” Kokichi claps his hands together. “That’s exactly what I want!”

“But why?” Kaito suddenly looks terribly confused.

“It makes me mysterious and therefore extremely irresistible,” Kokichi answers. “And that’s how I like it.”

“Really?”

“No, that was a lie,” Kokichi says. “You ask too many questions.”

“And you don’t answer enough of them.”

“Wow, we’re like complete opposites!”

“Why you...” Kaito’s fist trembles before he lets out a sigh that makes his entire body deflate.

“This conversation isn’t getting us anywhere.”

“I wasn’t aware you wanted it to go anywhere,” Kokichi replies.

Kaito sighs even louder. “You’re impossible.”

“I’m a delight, actually,” Kokichi says.

“You’re a *menace*.”

“You sound like Chabashira.”

Kaito pales. “Don’t say her name! You might accidentally summon her or some shit and I’m confident she wants to kick my ass!”

“Then Momota shouldn’t say such old fashioned things around her,” Kokichi says with a grin.

“I-I was just trying to be nice,” Kaito mumbles dejectedly.

“You’re a sap,” Kokichi says. He adjusts his scarf. “Anyway, I’m super tired so I totally want to go to bed now and you keep distracting me!”

Kaito stares at him incredulously. “Like hell I am!”

“Honestly, Momota. You have no decency, do you? Letting poor little old me get worn out like this,” Kokichi teases.

“If you want to go to bed so badly then go!”

“Nishishi, okay, okay! Nighty night, Momo-chan!”

“It’s Momota you little shit!”

Kokichi laughs loudly as he enters the dormitory, leaving Kaito to do whatever the hell he was doing before. He goes back to kneeling down in front of his door and pulls out yet another hair pin.

Someone knocks on the dormitory window. Kokichi dies a little on the inside. He spots Kaito wearing a confused expression before heading inside.

“Can you not get into your room?” Kaito asks with a slight frown.

“...no?”

“Then what are you doing?” Kaito pauses before sighing. “C’mon, come with me?”

“Hah?”

“You can sleep on my couch,” Kaito says. “At least then you’ll be in a room with a locked door. I

have my bedroom key on me so if anyone does come during the night then they can't get to us."

"That's..." Oddly nice of Kaito.

"Don't make this weird," Kaito mumbles as he unlocks his own door. "We're just two bros sharing the same room."

"Aw man, here I was hoping we'd be two bros who were going to share the same bed," Kokichi says.

"There's not enough room for two people," Kaito points out innocently. "There'd only be enough room for two people if they cuddled or some shit."

"Haha, Momota said the word cuddle."

"And what the fuck is wrong with that?!"

"It's such a...*cute* word."

"I'll kick you out," Kaito threatens as he locks his doors. He looks around before frowning. "I only have one blanket."

"And?"

"Well, you'll get cold without one," Kaito says, which means he clearly has no intention of giving up his own. His eyes suddenly light up before dimming just as quickly. "Although I do have..."

"Hmm?"

Kaito slips off his jacket and passes it to him. "You can use this as a blanket only if you promise not to drool all over it."

"Aw, you're so kind," Kokichi says as he holds the jacket to his chest. "Sacrificing your jacket to keep me warm through the cold, cold night."

"You better look after it," Kaito warns. "I'm serious, I love that jacket."

"You know what? Me too. I think I'll keep it," Kokichi says, cackling when he dodges Kaito's grab for it. "I was joking! I promise!"

"You better be," Kaito grumbles. He pauses before smiling. "Well, at least I'm able to give it to you under better circumstances this time."

"...what do you mean by that?" Kokichi asks as he tilts his head to the side. "This is the first time you've given me your jacket."

Kaito blinks before laughing nervously. "Haha, you're right. I don't know why I even said that..."

Kokichi adjusts the jacket in his arms quietly. "I wonder why you said it though."

"I just...had this image of you with it before," Kaito admits. "Well, more so you were lying on top of it."

"Huh. How interesting."

"I'm probably just imagining things though," Kaito sighs. "Sorry, I think I'm just going to go to

bed. It's been a long day and...yeah."

Kaito awkwardly shuffles off and Kokichi does the same. He lies down on Kaito's couch and throws Kaito's jacket over himself. It does a great job of keeping him warm and covers him exceptionally well.

It's a shame it doesn't help him get any sleep.

Tsumugi corners him on his way to the dining room.

"What was that about last night?" Tsumugi asks as Kokichi tries to step past her.

He fails. "I had a very important appointment I had to get to."

"That's a lie and you know it," Tsumugi grumbles. "Why did you run off like that? I had something important to tell you. Well, Monokuma passed on a message that he wanted me to tell you but the details don't really matter."

"Well hurry up and tell me now then whilst there's no one around," Kokichi says.

Tsumugi sighs. "Well first, Monokuma wanted to give you this."

She fishes something from her pocket. It's a piece of orange fabric with a key dangling from it. Kokichi raises an eyebrow as she wordlessly presses both the key and fabric into his hands. "What's this?"

"Your bedroom key. Monokuma found it," Tsumugi explains. "In the room for class trials."

"Hmm? Where's that?"

"I'll show you," Tsumugi says. "I was actually going to take you there last night too but you were rude and ran off."

"Oh I am *so* sorry about that."

"Then sound like you mean it," Tsumugi retorts moodily. "You're not going to run off again if I take you, right?"

"It depends. I might have another inconveniently timed appointment soon," Kokichi answers.

Tsumugi rolls her eyes as she stalks her way out of the building and outside. Kokichi follows reluctantly. As long as she doesn't take him back to that horrible hallway then he supposes he can indulge her just a little. She walks him over to a red door and pushes it open before pointing at a very strange looking Monokuma statue.

"Just wait a moment," Tsumugi says. Moments later the statue crumbles and reveals an elevator. Great, more confined spaces.

"You're not luring me into a trap are you?" Kokichi asks, half serious and half not.

"I wish I was," Tsumugi grumbles and she sounds so annoyed and unsatisfied that Kokichi is inclined to believe her.

The elevator takes them down, down, down into the ground. It makes his stomach flip flop from

how nauseating the ride is. He's not sure whether it's because of how fast the elevator is going or from the fact he's getting some horrendous vibes from this small space.

When he steps out he sees a room full of podiums. He also sees Monokuma but he does not matter because he's annoying. The bear waves the two of them over to a specific podium.

"Hey, hey, hey! Well if it isn't my two favourite students!" Monokuma greets them. "That was a lie, a headteacher never picks favourites!"

Wow, how interesting. Kokichi's day has *definitely* improved dramatically after learning that. "What do you want?"

"Well someone woke up on the wrong side of the couch," Monokuma says.

Kokichi narrows his eyes. "How did you know where I was?"

"I know everything."

"Oh? You slept on someone's couch?" Tsumugi asks. "Let me guess, Gonta was nice enough to let you sleep in his room?"

"Nope!" Kokichi answers.

"Moving on swiftly," Monokuma says as he gestures towards the floor. "I found this during my investigation and found it very interesting."

Kokichi looks at what Monokuma is pointing at and spots multiple things. Firstly, there's a message on the floor written in what seems to be blood. It's dry now. It looks like it'd been hastily written since the message is barely legible.

'Only way leave - survive'

Huh, what a strange thing to write. What's even more strange is why, well, someone chose to write that in particular in such a hurry. If whoever wrote was a participant in a killing game and knew the rules then they would already know that the only way to leave is to be one of two survivors. No, this message has to have *another* meaning behind it.

He wonders what state the person was in as they wrote this. Actually, whose blood is this anyway? Is this someone's dying message? No, the writing seems readable enough to be someone who had control over their hands. It's sloppy and looks like it was written in a rush but it looks like whoever wrote the message had a firm hand, well, finger. If a dying person had written this message then the letters would be less noticeable since a dying person would, presumably, write with less pressure.

At least that's what Kokichi thinks anyway.

There's also two small items next to the message that seem rather conveniently placed. There's a ring and a hairpin that is shaped like a music note placed neatly next to the message.

Tsumugi squeals. "Oh! I recognise those! That's Amami's ring and Akamatsu's hairpin!"

"Amami and Akamatsu? Who are they?" Kokichi asks.

"They're people who should've loaded in with us!" Tsumugi explains excitedly. "Ooh, they must've been here at some point!"

“The problem is why they aren’t here now,” Kokichi murmurs as he crouches down by the message and small items. “And what were they doing down here anyway?”

“They must’ve been in a class trial!” Tsumugi claps her hands together. “I wonder whose trial they were participating in? I hope it was fun! Hah, what am I saying? Every trial is fun!”

“Enough with the squealing already,” Monokuma grumbles. “What I want to know is where Amami and Akamatsu are *now*. Clearly they’ve been here, meaning they have to be somewhere, right?”

Tsumugi gasps. “What if they got punished?!”

“That is a possibility,” Monokuma says. “But...”

Kokichi wrinkles his nose. Didn’t the tablet say that both of them had graduated? That means they’re alive somewhere. Maybe they managed to find a way to leave the game for good?

But how?

“So is this what you wanted to show us last night?” Kokichi asks as he stands back up.

Monokuma nods. “I also found your bedroom key dangling off the podium.” He gestures towards the podium they’re standing next to.

“I wonder how Ouma’s key ended up at Akamatsu’s podium?” Tsumugi ponders. “Did she take it?”

No, Kokichi gave it to her because...

He swallows as the same fear from last night creeps up on him.

“Who knows,” Kokichi decides to say. “At least I can sleep in my own bed now.”

“And see what’s in your room because, wow, it sure is a mess!” Monokuma tells him. “Seriously, it’s like your room was used as a dumping ground or something! Good luck sleeping among that mess.”

Well that sounds interesting.

“It’s just a shame I only found a stupid ring and a hairpin,” Monokuma mumbles. “I wish my dear students would just come back to me. I miss them very, very much.”

“Seems ironic that if they do come back then you’re just going to kill them,” Kokichi points out.

“It’s the circle of life,” Monokuma says. “You’re born, you grow up, you join a killing game and you die.”

“Hmm. Sounds legit.”

“And you sound sarcastic,” Monokuma responds.

“I try my best.”

“Speaking of killing games...” Tsumugi’s eyes shine. “When do we get to start ours? The sooner we start it the better, right? All this waiting around is getting boring! I want the fun to start!”

“You need to have some patience,” Monokuma tells her. “We’ll start the game soon. I still have a grand entrance to plan.”

Tsumugi whines like a child. “Seriously?”

Kokichi smirks at her. He turns his head and starts to whistle innocently when she glares at him.

“I don’t know what you’re looking smug about,” Monokuma suddenly says. “Just because the game hasn’t started yet doesn’t mean it will.”

“You could always cancel it,” Kokichi tempts him.

“I’d rather die,” Tsumugi dramatically declares.

“I’d rather you wait until the game starts,” Monokuma says.

Kokichi watches as Monokuma and Tsumugi start to squabble. Honestly it’s actually a miracle that these two have managed to get so far with their master plan of hosting a killing game. Monokuma is clearly the brains whilst Tsumugi is the enthusiasm.

It’s just a shame that they both desperately want the killing game to happen.

...there’s no stopping the inevitable, is there?

Kokichi Ouma - Chapter 1 Part 4

Chapter Notes

I had to proofread this chapter on my phone so I'm sorry if there's any paragraphing errors or anything. If I spot any errors at a later date then I'll fix them but I think everything should be okay ahaha

Sorry for the slight wait, this chapter was a nightmare to write for some reason. At least I got it done in the end :)

Thank you to anyone who left a comment on the previous chapter!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

Kokichi is fairly confident he has everyone sussed out, which is rather impressive since breakfast had only been served about maybe ten minutes ago.

After receiving his bedroom key he of course went to check his room out. It wasn't exactly what he expected but at the same time it was. His room was messy and full of things that didn't make sense at first glance.

He stretches back on his chair, rolling his shoulders uncomfortably. He has a cup of water in front of him as well as an orange he has torn apart. There's no way in hell that he's touching any of Kirumi's cooking until he figures out what her intentions are and has decided that for now that the safest foods to eat are things that are sealed.

Kokichi watches quietly as Kirumi emerges from the kitchen with several plates balanced up and down her arms. He'd be impressed if he wasn't so concerned about the contents of the food. He eyes Tenko as she shoves a spoonful of soup into her mouth, watching as she squeals happily around the spoon.

A couple of crumbs trickle onto the table as Gonta grabs a bread roll for himself and Ryoma, who takes it from the large man with a small thanks. Ryoma slathers his roll with butter whilst Gonta opts for jam, which might have not been the best idea as he ends up slopping it over the table cloth. He checks Kirumi's face for a reaction but she's too busy pouring Angie a cup of what looks like apple juice.

To his left Miu is practically choking on some cereal as she all but pours it down her throat. She's clearly in some sort of rush. She finishes off her ghastly eating with an impressive mouthful of coffee, her throat moving up and down as she swallows.

He notices that Kiibo looks a little put off that everyone around him gets to enjoy an Ultimate's cooking whilst he doesn't. The robot is currently burning holes into a bowl of rice and for a moment Kokichi is convinced that lasers are going to shoot from Kiibo's eyes.

With a sigh he rolls his eyes over to where Kaito and Korekiyo are pouring tea together. Well, it's more so Korekiyo pouring tea as Kaito talks his ear off about something that's probably not important. Kokichi finds it slightly amusing that Korekiyo isn't hiding the fact that he's clearly not

listening as he finishes pouring his cup of tea and stares at a wall all the while Kaito's mouth continues to move at a dangerously fast speed.

He picks up another piece of orange and chews on it thoughtfully. Juice bursts in his mouth and he's sure his body is grateful for it. It had taken him sitting down at the table and reaching for something to eat for him to realise just how thirsty and hungry he was. He almost forgot that he had to help Tsumugi drag several people around the school as well as go on a pointless search around the school for an exit that doesn't even exist.

...ugh, *Tsumugi*. She's sitting across from him, a warm and innocent smile on her face as Kirumi places down what seems to be french toast in front of her. The maid's smile is equally as warm as she tells Tsumugi to enjoy her meal. Tsumugi tells her that she will and cuts into it quietly before making a stupidly big deal about how delicious Kirumi's cooking is.

Kokichi rolls his eyes as he shoves another piece of orange into his mouth to stop himself from insulting her. He can't help but find the actual texture of the orange to be disgusting but unfortunately he can't exactly blame anyone else but himself for picking to eat it in the first place. He chews bitterly as Tsumugi shoots him a smug look, clearly pleased with her more eloquent meal.

He's tearing another segment away from the peel when Kirumi makes herself known by his side. "Ouma, are you sure that there's nothing you want me to make? I can assure you that any request you have isn't too much for me to handle."

"Nope." Kokichi chews on his new piece of orange thoughtfully before swallowing. Kirumi is still standing next to him but now she's frowning. He sighs loudly. "Do I have something on my face or something? Oh, I get it! You've fallen madly in love with me, haven't you? Is that why you're staring at me so much?"

"Don't be so absurd," Kirumi scolds him before fidgeting with her hands. "I understand that this may be none of my business but...an orange isn't exactly the most filling and we don't know when the next we're going to eat is so-"

"I ate before I came here," Kokichi lies as he makes a pile of orange peel. "And you're correct, nothing about me is any of your business at all! And here I thought you were smart-"

"I'm simply worried that-"

"I don't want anything from you," Kokichi says and makes sure his tone leaves no room for any arguing. He scoops up the pile of orange peel and presses it firmly into Kirumi's hands. "If you're so desperate to do something for me then you can throw this in the rubbish."

Kirumi's lips go thin before she nods her head and leaves. Kokichi rolls his eyes as he grabs his glass of water.

"That was a little uncalled for," Tsumugi tells him as she lowers her fork from her mouth. "Why do you hate her so much anyway? It's not like she's done anything to annoy you, right?"

Kokichi shrugs. "Maybe she should just learn to take no for an answer. If I wanted her help then I would ask for it. Besides, she would never be able to make something that meets my standards anyway. I only eat food prepared by the best chefs in the world! I've had businesses shut down under my influence because of one bad meal!"

"I'm sure even you know that's a lie," Tsumugi responds before slicing up her meal just a little

more. Kokichi watches as steam rises from her chopped food.

He dodges her statement by taking a long sip of water that he got from the sink himself. Kirumi, of course, had pointed out to him that she had prepared a pitcher of water for everyone and that it was on the table but he had decided at that very moment he was suddenly deaf so had ignored her.

Still, he can't help but give the pitcher an envious glare as he watches the ice cubes rattle around as Tenko pours herself a drink. She places the pitcher onto the table with a small thud and he looks away with an irritated scowl.

"Quit being so paranoid," Tsumugi mutters and Kokichi bristles at her words. "People are going to get suspicious if you keep acting like this."

"Like what?"

"Like...like something is wrong," Tsumugi responds before lowering her voice. "I mean, yes, I know everyone only thinks that they've been kidnapped but, well, the big reveal about the killing game won't be as fun if everyone knows that something is up."

"I don't recall that being my problem," Kokichi says before licking his lips. "Besides, everyone here is stupid enough to not be worried in the first place. For all you know you could be eating food that's been tampered with."

Tsumugi pauses before snorting. "Oh, is *that* what you're so paranoid about?"

"What?"

"Why would the food be tampered with?" Tsumugi says before delicately placing another piece of french toast into her mouth. "I have to eat the same food as everyone else, you know? If the food had been tampered with then Monokuma would've warned me about it already."

"Are you sure you can trust him so easily though?" Kokichi asks lowly. "Maybe he'd think it would be funny if his partner in crime died so early on. You're both so obsessed about causing as much misery as possible. Maybe he'd get off on the fact that you died because he forgot to warn you about eating bad food."

Tsumugi pulls a thoughtful face before smiling. "Well, if it's for the despair then who am I to stop him? I'd do anything to make this game as despairing as possible. If that includes my death then so be it."

"You think people would be upset if you died?" Kokichi drums his fingers against the table. "Once people find out that you were responsible for them being kidnapped and that you were going to force them into a killing game then I think that they'd *celebrate* your death."

"It certainly is a possibility," Tsumugi says and she sounds so unbothered that Kokichi raises an eyebrow. "We'll just have to wait and see, won't we?"

She goes back to eating and Kokichi stares at her before sighing.

When figuring people out Kokichi had mentally placed Tsumugi in the 'unhinged' category which consists solely of herself. Well, for now anyway. As far as he's concerned she's just some delusional girl who wants to play God for the sake of despair. He's never heard of something so childish and frustrating in his life. She's stupid if she thinks people are just going to kill each other just like that too.

His eyes flicker over to Gonta and Ryoma. He personally wouldn't have paired the two together as friends but hey, he can't be right all the time. Maybe they work because Gonta wants to be friends with everyone and Ryoma is desperate for company. Kokichi doubts the tennis player will ever admit that out loud but he has this dead look in his eyes that obviously shows how lonely he is.

He wouldn't put them both in the same category but Kokichi knows that they're both smart in their own ways. As much as Gonta claims he's not that smart, well, he's wrong. He's a *scientist* who managed to claim the title of Ultimate Entomologist. If he truly was stupid then he'd actually have a brain as small as the bugs he cares for. No, Gonta isn't stupid, he's just socially naive and dare Kokichi even think it, *pure*. He sounds like the ideal person but Kokichi loathes to even think about what's going to happen to him when the game starts. He can easily see Gonta being manipulated into doing something stupid or framed for a crime he can't explain his way out of.

Ryoma on the other hand, well, he's been in prison for a while. He probably knows when to keep his mouth shut and to keep his head down. He's already got enough blood on his hands and Kokichi is curious if he's capable of dirtying his hands even further. Ryoma doesn't seem like the type of guy who would want to escape because he'll just be leaving one prison to head back into another. That puts Ryoma in a curious spot because Kokichi can't figure out whether he'd kill or not. However, if he continues to act as depressed as he does now then someone is eventually going to take advantage of that. The real question is whether Ryoma would fight back or not.

A laugh from Tenko catches his attention and he briefly glances over at her. She's talking excitedly to Angie and Kirumi, who has finally sat down to enjoy her own cooking. The maid notices him looking and turns away silently, taking a dainty sip from her cup of tea.

Tenko is a bit of a wild card since she knows aikido but isn't that a peaceful form of martial art? He has a vague understanding of aikido as a whole but he does know that it's a good way to fight without anyone *actually* getting hurt. Tenko herself seems to be a very conflicting person. He's seen firsthand that she snaps easily at anyone who is a male and has a fondness for women. There's probably a reason for that but it does make Kokichi wonder if all the men here are actually safe. She hasn't done anything to actively hurt anyone yet so maybe her talk about hating men is all bark and no bite.

At least Tenko wears her heart on her sleeve. Angie is a little different in the way that she's much more deceiving. To put it simply, whilst Tenko is more likely to help everyone, Angie seems more selfish and would rather have everyone help her instead. Kokichi watched her not lift a single finger this morning as everyone around her helped with breakfast whilst she watched happily. He doubts that she's maliciously selfish but more so that she's just not used to actually helping out. She smiles a lot and talks to her God, which is fine but there's something about her that Kokichi thinks he should keep an eye on.

Speaking of keeping an eye on people, Kirumi is certainly at the top of his list. If he's right in remembering then she's the only person who has killed in each game. The whiteboard in his room has her listed as a killer and the whiteboard in blondie's bedroom also has her down as one too. Kirumi claims that it's her duty to help everyone but Kokichi wonders if she's simply putting on an act or if she has simply blurred the lines between being selfless and stupid. He hasn't yet figured out how far she'll go to carry out a request. Better yet, he doesn't know what requests she'll accept and deny. If someone asked her to kill so that they could leave then would she do it? Only time will tell. Until then Kokichi has accepted that her motherly act may just be a facade.

Kiibo sighs as Miu scrapes her chair across the floor. Kokichi watches as Miu wipes her skirt, which has coffee on it. She must've spilt it on herself.

His eyes narrow. Blondie's whiteboard had said Miu killed him during a previous game and the very thought alone makes his blood boil. He could tear strips from her for the sheer audacity of her actions but there's something stopping him. Miu is loud and vulgar and thinks very highly of herself but Kokichi has learnt that sometimes the louder someone is, the more insecure they are. Maybe Miu is so insecure that she has to be the only person she hears so she can block out everyone else in fear of them insulting her. She seems to think that she's the most important girl in the world and whilst she might've made a lasting impact, well, she clearly needs to learn that the world doesn't revolve around her.

Kiibo needs to be told the same things too. He takes everything personally and doesn't seem to know what a joke is. He needs to take a step back and realise that everything isn't about him and that people aren't that amazed that he's a living robot. Technology has been around for a while now and it's cool that someone has managed to make an AI so advanced that it can replicate being human but there's something about Kiibo that rubs Kokichi up the wrong way. He has this look in his eyes that makes it feel like he's watching you at all times and the fact that he's constantly recording everything is a major red flag too. Kiibo claims he's constantly recording to protect himself from robophobic remarks but that's just a little *too* excessive. Kiibo is clearly suspicious.

Kokichi finally faces Korekiyo and Kaito. Korekiyo is practically drowning himself with tea whilst Kaito talks about stars and rockets and something else that sounds very space themed.

Korekiyo...Korekiyo, Korekiyo, Korekiyo. He's creepy. There's something very off about him that Kokichi can't put his finger on. He appreciates how blunt the guy is but Korekiyo doesn't actually seem all that bothered about being here. It's almost as if being kidnapped is just a minor inconvenience for him rather than a big deal. Korekiyo is also the only person that Kokichi knows of that has killed two people instead of one. Angie and Tenko. Coincidentally, both of his victims were girls. Then again, maybe it isn't a coincidence. Kokichi doesn't know. He also doesn't know what Korekiyo's face looks like since he hides it behind his mask. Does he hide himself for personal reasons or does he just like wearing his mask?

Finally, there's Kaito. Good old Kaito, the boisterous man with an obsession with space. He clearly sees himself as the leader of the group since he's had no problems bossing everyone around so far. He's also annoyingly good at calling people out, especially Kokichi himself. Kokichi wonders if that's a good thing or if Kaito is just a hypocrite. If Kokichi ever called Kaito out then would the astronaut like that or not? Kaito does seem like the type of person who has a short temper. Kokichi has seen the way he clenches his fist when he hears something he doesn't like. He seems to be a little old fashioned too, especially when it comes to men and women. Some people might think it's sweet he cares so much about keeping women safe but Kokichi can't help but think that Kaito is actually rather patronising. Maybe he'll grow out of it.

Kokichi leans forward and cups his face with his hands, elbows resting on the table. He's been in numerous situations before that caused him trouble. Such as that one time when he was spray painting a wall with DICE and the police caught them. He had twisted his ankle whilst running away and had to hide in a bin. Now that certainly was a bad situation.

However, in the grand scale of things then he supposes this situation he's in right now is probably the worst situation he's ever been in. The kidnapping isn't all that bad but the killing? That *really* pisses him off. It doesn't help that he's practically got every single odd stacked against him without any way of tipping the scales in his favour.

If he steps out of line? Flashback light. He tries to warn someone? Monokuma is always watching. Escape? Hah, there's *no exit*. The only thing that brings him the tiniest bit of relief is that he knows that five people have managed to escape before, that the graduates known as Shuichi, Maki,

Himiko, Kaede and Rantaro are far, *far* away from here. It would be nice of them to come back and help but Kokichi doubts that even himself would return to face another killing game if he had the choice.

Monokuma seems frantic about having everyone here but after finding Kaede's hairpin and Rantaro's ring, well, the bear seemed less pedantic about everything being perfect. After all, if someone like Monokuma can't find five missing students then there's no chance of Kokichi being able to either. The worrying outcome from all of this is that Monokuma is probably going to announce the game soon, maybe even today.

Kokichi sneaks a glance at Tsumugi, who has just finished her breakfast. She's looking down at her plate with a blank face, eyes half lidded and empty. Of course he's furious at her for wanting a game like this but the leaderly part of him, the part of him who can see past the walls that people build up, feels nothing but...*pity*. No one just wakes up and decides to host a killing game one day. Kokichi wonders what Tsumugi's breaking point was and why she turned to despair of all things to console herself.

He blinks when Kaito stands up and asks everyone to look at him.

"Listen up, everyone! Now that we've all rested and had something to eat I think now is the best time to find a way out of here!" Kaito slams his fists together. "Iruma, you said that you could make something to break down the doors in the tunnel, right?"

"I said I could if I had the right shit to work with," Miu corrects him before leaning back into her chair with a grin. "But yeah, of course I fucking can."

"Did you check out that building with all the materials?" Tsumugi asks curiously.

"Of course I did," Miu says with a heavy roll of her eyes. "I'm not fucking brain dead."

"...and?" Kaito presses expectantly when Miu pauses.

The inventor twirls a strand of hair around her finger. "There's plenty of shit for me to use but don't expect me to make something perfect right away. I'm an inventor, not a miracle worker. Say if I did make something that does work, well..." Miu sniffs as she looks to the side. "It might take a couple of hours to make s-so don't blame me if we're stuck here for a little while."

"Of course we won't blame you!" Gonta looks horrified that she would even think such a thing. "Iruma only trying to help us! Gonta happily wait for her to make something to help break down door!"

Miu blinks and her cheeks rapidly turn from pale to pink. "I-Is that so?"

"If it's possible I would like to stay with you whilst you build," Kiibo says. "We don't know when or if our captor is going to come back so I'd like to keep an eye on you just in case...well..."

There's an uncomfortable pause before Kirumi clears her throat. "Kiibo is correct, we don't know when our captor is going to return but we shouldn't just assume that we're safe at the moment. With that in mind I would also like to accompany Iruma as she builds."

"W-What? You don't think that I'm going to get into trouble for making something, am I?" Miu asks nervously. She twirls her hair even faster, making the tip of her finger go white. "I-I'm not taking the blame if w-we get into trouble."

"No one is getting into trouble because we'll be far away from here by the time our captor comes

back,” Kaito says. The most mind boggling thing is that he sounds like he believes what he is saying is true. “Besides, are we sure that we’re actually in danger? It looks like someone was expecting us to be here anyway since there were pictures of us in the dormitory.”

“We should be concerned about the fact that we don’t remember how we got here in the first place,” Korekiyo points out before tucking a strand of hair behind his ear. “However, it is also simply too early to start panicking about things out of our control.”

“Maybe all this just one big misunderstanding?” Gonta suggests as he clenches a fist. “Maybe we *not* in danger but...but simply forgot why we here in first place? There pictures of us in bedrooms so Gonta think that maybe...maybe we been here for a while and just forgot.”

Kokichi almost chokes on his water as Tsumugi ducks down to hide her amused expression. Tenko’s loud voice thankfully masks his sudden choking session. “This isn’t some sci-fi plot! It’s absurd to think that all eleven of us would forget about being here before!”

“Well if we haven’t been here before then clearly someone was expecting us to be here at some point,” Ryoma murmurs before tugging on his hat. “I just don’t understand why. We’re just a random group of people who have never met each other before.”

“I don’t remember going to this school either,” Kiibo adds. “Or even applying to it in the first place.”

“Angie doubts that the school is even fit for students to be in,” Angie says. “It’s dirty and there’s plants growing in the hallways. Angie’s God is telling her that this place is abandoned and in more ways than one!”

Korekiyo raises an eyebrow. “Angie, whatever do you mean by that?”

“Well...” Angie presses a paintbrush to her lip. “This is such a strange place for someone to decide to put us, yes? Angie also noticed that there were some pictures of other people that aren’t here anymore! Either, um, five more students were expected to be here or, or, or that they *have* been here before us and we simply weren’t there so our captor, like, only thought they were here whilst we weren’t and dealt with them and not us!”

Tenko looks like she’s just sucked on a lemon. “Angie, Tenko didn’t understand a single thing you said!”

“Even I’m confused,” Tsumugi admits quietly. “Are you saying that people have been here at separate times perhaps?”

“Angie thinks that...” Angie clasps her hands together. “There should be sixteen of us here, right? Because of the pictures in the bedrooms! But, but, there must’ve been some mix up and five people arrived before us and...”

“Left?” Ryoma frowns.

“Maybe,” Angie says with a shrug. “Angie is only saying what God is telling her. He says that we’ve been abandoned.”

“But that can’t be right,” Kiibo stresses as he holds up a finger. “Someone must’ve brought us here recently. If we’d been here for days then I’d think we’d all know. After all, I woke up with plenty of battery left.”

“Tenko is just so confused!” Tenko runs her hands through her bangs. “Ugh, why can’t Tenko

remember how she got here!? It's like someone went inside of Tenko's brain and took that one specific memory away from her!"

"Not just from you, from everyone!" Gonta points out. "Gonta no remember how he got here either and everyone else same, right?!"

"That's right," Tsumugi agrees before she wraps her arms around herself. "Just...what sort of situation are we in where we just forget certain things like that? It's plainly confusing!"

"C'mon guys, we're not going to get anywhere if we start to worry about things like that!" Kaito loudly announces. "Even if everything is confusing, we're just wasting time speculating about things we have no idea about! If something bad does happen then we'll confront it head on when the time comes for it but for now we really shouldn't be wasting time like this!"

"Ah, you're right," Tsumugi murmurs. "But is it really okay to just pretend that everything is okay?"

"Well of course everything is okay," Kaito says. "We should only start worrying when things aren't okay."

"We've been kidnapped," Korekiyo states drily. "I think it's safe to say that perhaps things *aren't* okay at this very moment."

Kaito sighs. "I'm just saying that things could be a whole lot worse right now. So until things actually get worse we need to stop moping around and worrying about things outside of our control and just get on with things!"

"By that do you mean wait around until Iruma finishes making something that'll help break down the door?" Ryoma asks and there's an obvious hint of sarcasm in his voice.

"Yeah!" Kaito pumps a fist.

"I'm not doing all the fucking heavy work," Miu says with a scowl. "I know I'm capable of making something that will blow your tiny pea sized brains but why the fuck should I be the only one who has to do everything?!"

"I can assure you that is not the case," Kirumi reassures her. "Whilst you're working I think everyone else should look around the school for anything that might help explain how we got here. The more we know about our situation, the better."

"You took the words right out of my mouth!" Kaito agrees and he's oblivious to everyone's shared expression of doubt. "So-"

"Angie thinks that looking around is just going to be a waste of her time," Angie says as she tilts her head from side to side. "So Angie thinks she'll just skip the searching and wait to see what happens instead."

Kaito's mouth opens and closes but no sound comes out. Thankfully, Kirumi still has the brains to speak. "Yonaga, it's important that everyone helps. What on earth could be more important to you than finding a way to leave?"

"Angie does want to leave," Angie says. "But she just thinks looking around is a waste of time because if there was anything important for us to find then we would've found it by now, yes?"

Kirumi clears her throat uncomfortably. "We hardly had the chance to have a proper look around

yesterday so there's always a possibility that we missed something-"

"But Angie watched Kirumi search yesterday and you found nothing!" Angie retaliates. "So Angie is going to skip the searching and-"

"Don't you think you're being a little selfish?" Ryoma counters with a deep frown.

"Um, Angie thinks that she's just being smart," Angie says. "Because God has told her that searching is a waste of time, so, like, Angie would rather do something else if God thinks she's just going to be wasting her time."

"Do you often rely on your God for guidance?" Korekiyo asks and Angie instantly twists her head over into his direction with a wide smile. Korekiyo clears his throat. "I do not wish to offend you but..."

"Why does your God think searching is a waste of time?" Kokichi asks curiously.

Angie hums before answering. "Because like Angie said, if there was something for us to actually find then we would've found it by now. Angie thinks that the best thing for us all to do is to just wait."

"Whilst I bust my ass working to get us out of here?" Miu huffs before gritting her teeth. "The fucking nerve of-"

"Seriously, that's enough!" Kaito sighs. "Iruma, just...just starting building, will ya?"

"Fine! But don't be surprised if I fucking leave without any of you!" Miu grumbles. "You should all be on your knees begging me for my help! The sheer audacity of all you virgins to just expect me to do all the work..."

Kiibo pats her shoulder. "I appreciate you, Iruma."

Miu flushes. "Y-You're just saying that because I'm pissed."

"No, we all appreciate what you're doing," Kirumi says and gives everyone a stern glare. "Isn't that right?"

Kokichi murmurs a 'yes' alongside everyone else. Miu sniffs and crosses her arms with another huff. "A bunch of fucking sheep, the lot of ya."

Kiibo sighs quietly. "Let's go, Iruma."

"Like previously mentioned I will accompany you both," Kirumi says as she stands up gracefully from her chair. "But I do think it's in everyone's best interest to not just wait around for help. As of now we don't know if anyone knows we're missing so we might very well have to rely on ourselves to find an exit."

Angie clearly doesn't think Kirumi directed her words towards her because as soon as the trio leave the room she leans forwards and closes her eyes, clasping her hands together tightly. Perhaps she's praying. It's not very easy to tell.

Kaito's jaw twitches as he figures out what to do next, clearly at a loss with what to do with Angie since she's clearly decided that searching the school is beneath her.

"Do you really think searching is a waste of time?" Tsumugi asks quietly as she turns to face

Angie. “And...And what if Iruma is unable to actually make something that’ll help us? What if we’re trapped here forever and no one finds us?”

“Don’t say shit like that!” Kaito scolds her. “Of course we’re getting out of here! I still have stuff I need to do!”

“If Iruma no make something then...then Gonta find way to break door himself!” Gonta promises as he pumps his fists. “Gonta know he couldn’t break door yesterday but Gonta rested a lot last night so Gonta is in top form!”

“The door is made from metal, yes?” Korekiyo looks slightly amused at Gonta’s words. “I know you’re rather muscular but even you must have your limits, correct? There’s no point hurting yourself over a door that might not even lead us anywhere.”

“Not you too,” Kaito grumbles as he puts a fist to his hip. “What’s with all the negativity? We’re seriously not going to get far if all everyone is going to do is complain! Sure, our situation isn’t the best but there’s always a way to fix things!”

“Tenko agrees but she can’t help but think that something is wrong,” Tenko says. “Seriously, who kidnaps a group of Ultimates and doesn’t bother revealing themselves afterwards? Is our captor scared or something?”

“M-Maybe they’re waiting on purpose,” Tsumugi suggests as she turns pale. “What if they’re trying to make us think we’re safe when we’re actually not?”

“There’s no point in thinking like that. You’re only going to make yourself ill with worry,” Ryoma says. He shoves his hands into his pockets. “Just be grateful that things aren’t any worse than they are already.”

Great, the conversation is going to go around in circles at this rate. Kokichi leans back on his chair with a bored huff.

“This group is a disaster,” Korekiyo murmurs around his cup of tea, purposefully looking away when Kaito frowns at him.

“It’s because no one is cooperating!” Kaito huffs as he slams his fist down onto his palm. “Where’s the teamwork, guys?! We’re all in the same situation and we all want to get out of here, right?!”

“Well of course we all want to leave but...” Tsumugi bites her lip. “What if we’re just wasting our time trying to find an exit?”

Kaito runs a hand down his face. “Sitting around doing nothing is going to be an even bigger waste of our time!”

“Everyone...” Gonta murmurs, looking around the room like a lost puppy. “Please stop arguing!”

“Tenko wants to look but she can’t think of anywhere she didn’t search yesterday!” Tenko argues with a frustrated cry. “Tenko knows all the girls tried their best so if we missed something then it’s the boys fault!”

“Hah? How is it *our* fault?!” Kaito fires back. “We’re the ones who actually found an exit!”

“Yeah, a *locked* one!” Tenko responds.

“At least we found an exit. Your group found nothing at all,” Korekiyo says. “Your insistence to

blame males for every problem in the world is growing boring very fast, Chabashira.”

Her face turns red. “Of course you throw the blame back at Tenko!”

“Everyone, please!” Gonta’s voice grows louder.

“Oh dear...” Tsumugi murmurs and she does a very good act of pretending to be sad. “We’ve not even been here a full day yet and everyone is already arguing...”

“I just don’t understand what the issue is!” Kaito throws his hands up in the air. “It’s almost as if none of you actually want to get out of here!”

“Of course we want to leave!” Tenko retorts. “But we don’t want to be bossed around by some degenerate who thinks he knows everything!”

Kaito pouts. “It was Tojo who suggested we search the school! Not me!”

“But God says that’s a waste of time,” Angie says, sounding very much like a broken record.

Ryoma lowers his head down onto the table. “I see I’m still in Hell then.”

“You’re all happy to complain that doing anything is just a waste of time but what happens when something bad actually happens?! We’ll have no one to blame but ourselves for just sitting around on our asses all day whilst expecting Iruma to do all the heavy work!” Kaito fires back. “Seriously, are you all five or something?!”

“That’s enough!” Gonta shouts. His voice is loud enough to cause the cutlery on the table to rattle. Kokichi turns to face him curiously. “Everyone need to stop arguing with each other! Gonta can see why some people think it waste of time to search but Gonta also understand that there might be something we missed! Gonta just think that everyone need to try and understand each other!”

Kaito grits his teeth. “I can’t just sit around and do nothing in a situation like this! I’m not some... some princess that just lets everyone else do all the dirty work!”

“And Tenko is not some *degenerate* who forces people to do stuff they don’t want to,” Tenko says with a frown. “Tenko *does* want to search the school again but she isn’t going to force everyone to do so if they don’t want to! Tenko gets that not everyone has the stamina to walk around the school over and over again.”

“If that’s why people don’t want to search then why don’t they just say so?” Kaito says. “People who don’t just say what they want...they really piss me off! Instead of being cryptic just say what you really think.”

Angie smiles. “Was that perhaps directed at Angie?”

“It was directed at,” Kaito runs both of his hands through his hair with a huff, “everyone who won’t man up enough to just admit that they’re scared!”

“Man up?” Tenko’s eyes shine dangerously.

“Wait, what do you mean about people being scared?” Ryoma asks.

“Well that’s why some of you don’t want to search, right?” Kaito asks as he clenches and unclenches one of his fists. “Because you’re scared that we’re not going to find anything. But fuck that, I know there has to be at least *something* here that’ll explain what’s going on!”

“Angie isn’t scared,” Angie says and she looks almost amused. “Angie just knows that no matter how much we look, nothing is going to change. So, like, Angie has decided she’s just going to wait.”

“For?” Kaito looks at her expectantly.

“Something to happen,” Angie answers.

Flabbergasted is probably the correct word to describe Kaito’s expression. “Seriously?”

“Gonta thinks this is enough!” Gonta interrupts the argument. “Gonta no want to listen to friends argue anymore! Gonta understand that everyone scared, even Momota and Angie! But everyone shouldn’t be angry at each other! Everyone should be angry at Gonta for not being able to break down door yesterday! If Gonta was a little stronger then things wouldn’t be bad right now!”

“That’s not true, Gonta!” Tsumugi jumps to his defence instantly. “From the sounds of it that door sounds too good to be true anyway!”

“For all we know the door could just be a trap,” Korekiyo says. “After all, there was a sign down in the tunnels pointing to where the supposed exit was. That sign looked a little too conveniently placed if you ask me.”

“Wait, what?” Tenko blinks. “Why didn’t anyone mention this earlier! When you put it like that then that door obviously sounds like a trap!”

“Even if the signs are kind of weird it’s not like we have another exit to turn to!” Kaito argues. “Just because we weren’t able to get the door open yesterday doesn’t mean we can’t open it today! It’s not like opening a door is impossible!”

“But if Gonta couldn’t open it first try...” Gonta’s lip wobbles. “And if Iruma not able to make something to help then...”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it,” Korekiyo sighs. “But all this arguing and going back and forth is getting childish.”

“How about we all...settle down and have one more drink before we decide what to do as a group?” Tsumugi suggests. “I get that, well, some of us have conflicting opinions but it’s plain to see that all we’re doing is wasting our time arguing.”

“How ironic,” Ryoma murmurs. “Wasting time having an argument about wasting time.”

Kaito looks suddenly very frustrated as he shakes his head in disbelief. “Nah, sorry Shirogane but I can’t just sit around and drink tea in a situation like this. If you all want to waste time complaining then fine but I can’t just...I can’t just wait around knowing that if I do then something bad might happen.”

“W-Who said anything about anything bad happening?” Tsumugi blinks before wringing her hands nervously by her waist. “Momota, you don’t think something awful is going to happen to us if we don’t get out of here soon, do you?”

“Well we were clearly brought here for a reason,” Kaito says with a sniff. “And I ain’t going to wait around to find out what that reason is.”

It’s rather fascinating realising how many people clearly subconsciously know that something very bad is going to happen soon. Kokichi eyes Kaito curiously as the astronaut clenches his fist. First

Angie's rambles about being abandoned, then Gonta claiming that they might've been here before and now Kaito's worried about something bad happening soon if they don't leave. It's so...strange to watch. It's like everyone subconsciously remembers that they have been here before and are having random feelings of *deja vu* that are warning them that staying here is dangerous.

Kokichi wonders if he would've picked up on everyone's strange ramblings and behaviour if he had his memory wiped along with everyone else. On one hand it could be easy to blame the bickering on the tense situation everyone is in. Then again, well, why would, say, Angie, not want to help herself by trying to find another exit or something? The answer is simple.

Angie probably subconsciously knows that there is no way out and trying to escape is pointless.

He can't tell if everyone else feels the same way as her or not. Even Kaito looks like he's pissed off about something but his heroic sense of duty is blinding him. Maybe he looks so angry because he also knows that finding an exit is a waste of time. Hell, even Gonta has realised that something is wrong yet he's trying to play peacemaker. It's honestly rather intriguing but at the same time it's also rather sad to watch.

Only Kokichi and Tsumugi know that Monokuma is going to arrive soon and make their biggest fears come true. Yet here Kokichi is, sitting with everyone and pretending that everything is going to be okay. He knows he's being more than selfish but...it's not *his* problem. It's not *his* fault that Monokuma picked him specifically for help. It's not. It's certainly not his fault that Monokuma and Tsumugi want to host a killing game either.

He's blameless really.

...truly, wholeheartedly blameless.

There's a sour after taste in his mouth as he puts down his cup of water. He'd been taking sporadic sips from it throughout the argument despite the glass being half empty. It's a miracle that he managed to make the water last as long as it did.

He watches as Kaito sighs and leaves the room alone.

"Is...Is anyone going to go after him?" Tsumugi asks nervously. "After hearing what he said, um, it sounds like we shouldn't travel around the school alone anymore."

"Maybe Gonta go after him?" Gonta suggests before a pained expression takes over his face. "But if Gonta go and everyone start arguing again then who will stop argument?"

"The fact you even have to worry about that in the first place just shows that this group still has a ways to go," Ryoma mutters.

"Well it's not Angie's fault that Kaito is being so stubborn," Angie says, cracking an eye open to look around the room. "Kaito is the one telling us to stop being so scared but out of everyone here Kaito is the most worried."

Tenko hesitates. "Tenko is sure that we're all just as worried as each other but..."

Kokichi sighs. This conversation is giving him a headache. He stands up noisily from his chair, purposefully catching the attention of the entire room. "All this complaining is getting really boring, you know?"

"Where do you think you're going?" Tenko asks.

“To go and rile Momota up some more obviously,” Kokichi says before rolling his eyes. “But that’s a lie. My legs hurt from sitting around for so long and I’d rather not sit through another mind numbing conversation like that.”

Tsumugi peers at him curiously. “So...where are you actually going?”

“To make sure Momota doesn’t do something stupid like punch a wall,” Kokichi says.

Tsumugi seems satisfied with his answer and doesn’t look too upset that he’s leaving. She’s probably having too much fun listening to everyone bicker. He gives the room a lazy wave before leaving, quickly spotting Kaito heading downstairs and jogging after him.

—

They end up in the library.

As Kokichi predicted, Kaito is currently *extremely* pissed off and looks like he wants to punch something. He watches as Kaito pulls on several books at random and rolls his eyes.

“Momota, what are you *exactly* trying to achieve?” Kokichi drawls out as Kaito angrily shoves a thick green book back into the bookcase.

Kaito huffs. “Isn’t there always some sort of secret passageway or some shit in libraries or something?”

“How old are you again?” Kokichi lets out a snort.

“I’m being serious!” Kaito insists. When the next book he tugs on does nothing he scowls and crosses his arms. “Did you follow me to make fun of me or something? I’m really not in the mood to deal with your sarcasm right now.”

“What? I would never dream of bullying my darling Momota!”

Kaito looks at him drily. “Oh really?”

“Really, really!” Kokichi insists before something catches his eyes. Why *hello* there suspicious mark on the ground. He eyes the bookshelf next to the mark and narrows his eyes. It looks like the mark was made from the bookshelf being dragged out several times. Hmm.

“Ouma, I’m being serious,” Kaito continues. “Enough of the attitude.”

“Momota might be complaining that I’m annoying but I bet you’re secretly relieved that my beautiful voice is distracting you,” Kokichi says. “Unless Momota is the sort of person who likes being left alone with his own thoughts as his only company?”

“Do you have an off button?”

“Yeah, it’s called dying.”

Kaito sighs loudly. “That’s a little dramatic, don’t you think? Besides, you hardly said a thing in the dining hall when everyone else was arguing. Why are you so talkative now?”

“Maybe I just didn’t have anything to say?” Kokichi suggests. “Or maybe the argument everyone was having was so stupid that my entire body shut down from the sheer idiocy radiating from it.”

“If you thought the argument was so stupid then why didn’t you step in to stop it?” Kaito asks.

“You’re the Ultimate Leader, right? Why did you just sit back and let everyone tear strips from each other?”

“I’m actually the Ultimate *Supreme* Leader,” Kokichi says with a small huff. “And sometimes arguing is the only way forward. At least you know where everyone stands now.”

“It doesn’t mean I...” Kaito pulls a face. “I *don’t* actually like arguing with people, you know? I don’t like feeling like I’m the bad guy just because I have a different opinion. What’s wrong with wanting to explore anyway? It’s not like things will get worse if we do one more sweep around the school, right?”

Kokichi shrugs. “How should I know?”

“I mean, *fuck*, I get that some of them are probably scared but they’re putting everyone at risk by doing nothing!” Kaito continues. “It’s almost as if some of them don’t even want to try to leave! I can’t just fucking accept that we might be trapped here unlike them! Until I’ve seen with my own two eyes that there’s really no exit then...”

“Sheesh, you really are pissed off,” Kokichi says. He leans heavily on a random bookcase. “Okay then, spaceman. What are you going to do if there ends up being no exit? What if Iruma does make something that breaks down the door only for there to be another obstacle in our way?”

“Then we’ll get rid of that obstacle too,” Kaito responds. “And the one after that and the one after that and the one after-”

“Okay, okay! Momota has made his point!” Kokichi holds his hands up in mock defeat. “But isn’t Momota perhaps being a little bit naive? Some problems might be impossible to deal with, you know?”

“Nothing is impossible!” Kaito insists, turning to face him with wide eyes. “And if something is impossible then I’ll just make it possible!”

Kokichi snorts in disbelief. “Just like that?”

“Just like that,” Kaito agrees. “I’ve got way too much to do to just accept that I’m stuck here. I still haven’t gone to space yet so...” Kaito pauses as his brows furrow.

“Momota?”

“Huh?” Kaito blinks before shaking his head. “Sorry, I must’ve zoned out for a second.”

“You were on about how you need to go to space,” Kokichi prompts. “Which is sort of weird. You’d think that as the Ultimate Astronaut you would’ve been already.”

“I have!” Kaito rubs the back of his head. “I mean, I haven’t but...”

“Did you hit your head or something?” Kokichi asks. “You’ve either been or you haven’t. It’s not that hard.”

“Shut up...” Kaito grumbles and there’s a distant look in his eyes that gives Kokichi a big enough hint to back off. “I *haven’t*. I just, ah, must’ve dreamt that I’ve been in space before.”

“Right...” Kokichi raises an eyebrow. “Phew, for a second I thought Momota had finally lost the plot.”

“I-I just got confused!” Kaito grumbles and he sounds like he’s more upset with himself than at Kokichi. “Just forget it, okay? I got jumbled up! Big deal!”

“Don’t worry, Momota. It just so happens I completely forgot what we were talking about anyway,” Kokichi says.

Kaito looks at him before laughing. It’s not a nervous laugh or an angry laugh. Perhaps it’s more like a relieved laugh? “Of course you did ya little menace.”

Kokichi let’s Kaito go back to his book tugging adventures, which is rather amusing to watch since Kaito is making absolutely no progress at all nor does he even have a system going on. He jumps from shelf to shelf almost desperately, pulling on a variety of books ranging from tiny slim books to thick hardbacks that would definitely cause a concussion if they were dropped onto someone’s head.

The sour taste in his mouth returns when Kaito puts his hands on his hips and huffs in reluctant defeat. Either he’s completely exhausted himself by rattling books around or he’s realised that maybe destroying the library isn’t the best idea. Kokichi swallows and eyes the mark on the floor again.

He’s somewhat surprised that Kaito hasn’t noticed it himself but then again it does just look like a regular worn out mark. The only reason why Kokichi thinks it’s relevant is because of the circular shape of it. His best bet is that the bookcase near it can be swung open like a door, meaning that Kaito isn’t actually entirely wrong about the idea of there being a secret passage in a library.

It’s just, *ugh*, isn’t having a secret door in a library so cliché? Then again everyone was kidnapped by Tsumugi and she’s a walking disaster. She probably put a secret door in the library because she thought it would be cool.

Kokichi pretends to yawn and strategically uses his hand to smack a couple of books over to where the mark on the floor is. The books land on the floor with several heavy thumps and Kaito stares at him with a look of pure exasperation.

“Seriously?” Kaito sighs as he leans down to pick up the books.

Kokichi watches intensely as Kaito slowly uncovers the mark on the floor. Look Kaito, it’s right there Kaito. Using your fucking eyes for just a second Kaito and you will see the blatantly obvious mark on the floor. For fucks sake it’s right there *whatareyoudoing-*

He launches another book on the floor directly on top of the mark.

“Ouma!”

“Whoops, my dainty fingers slipped,” Kokichi says with a tight smile.

Kaito rolls his eyes and adds the book onto his already impressive pile that’s stacked way too high. Kokichi sucks in a breath when Kaito finally pauses.

“Is something wrong?” Kokichi asks innocently.

“...nah, just needed to take a second to catch my breath,” Kaito responds.

Kokichi is seconds away from tearing his hair out. Here he is trying to be nice and let Kaito take an extremely epic win of uncovering a secret passageway in the library and the dumbass is too blind to see the damn hint that Kokichi has blatantly made clear. He’s tempted to chuck a book at the

astronaut's head but then Kaito continues speaking.

"Huh, what an odd mark on the ground."

"Oh wow, really! Wow, I totally didn't see that!" Kokichi quickly says as he stands next to Kaito, putting a hand to his chin. "Hmm, yes, I see. How suspicious."

"Is it?" Kaito asks. "It's just a mark, right? The whole school is practically in ruins so of course everything isn't going to be in perfect condition, including the floor."

"You're the one who said it's odd," Kokichi comments, resting his hands behind his head to hide how tightly he's clenching them.

Kaito rubs his goatee before humming. "Yeah, *yeah* it is. Just look at the shape of it!"

Oh thank God. For a second Kokichi truly thought Kaito's brain cells had expired. He takes a step back as Kaito points out the strange curve of the mark before eyeing up the bookcase next to it. The two share a look before Kaito grabs the bookshelf and gives it a slight pull. It springs open right away and Kokichi is thankful that he was quick enough to take a step back before the case could smack him in the face.

"I fucking knew it!" Kaito pumps his fists excitedly. "There really is a secret passageway here!"

Kaito's excitement turns out to be extremely contagious as even Kokichi allows himself to give the astronaut a pleased smile. Kaito bounds over to the door and starts looking it up and down with a hand on his hip. Straight away it's painfully obvious that Kaito's excitement fizzles drastically as he spots that the door needs to be opened with a keycard. That doesn't stop Kaito from hitting the door a couple of times with his fist.

"Shit..." Kaito's hand flops to his side sadly. "It's fucking locked."

"Well how about you make it fucking unlocked instead?" Kokichi suggests.

"It needs a damn keycard!" Kaito points out. "Just like the door in the tunnels! What's it with this place and keycards anyway? I thought the school was abandoned! How come the electricity is running fine?"

"Oh? You've only realised that now?" Kokichi teases.

Kaito rolls his eyes. "But if we have things like electricity and fresh food then that must mean we haven't been abandoned like Angie claims we have. That just means I'm right about her being scared!"

"Whatever you say, Momo-chan."

"What have I said about you calling me that!" Kaito sighs. "Anyway, I guess we should tell the others about the door. I can't wait to see the look on Chabashira's face when I tell her that she was wrong all along!"

"Hah? Does Momota like bullying girls? That's so not cool," Kokichi points out teasingly. "Just wait until I tell Chabashira what you said!"

"Y-You're taking what I sound out of context!" Kaito insists. "In fact, how about you tell her about the door instead! Yeah, that sounds like a great idea!"

“Oh, so you want Chabashira to punch me in the face instead?” Kokichi says with a snuffle. “Y-You’re so mean, Momo-chan! Did you not know that my bones are made from glass? One punch from Chabashira and I’ll die!”

“That’s obviously a lie!” Kaito splutters before awkwardly searching through his pockets. “Ah shit, I thought I had a packet of tissues on me.”

“Eh? Why does Momo-chan want tissues? He’s not going to do something naughty is he?”

“I was going to give you one to wipe your fucking face with but I’ve suddenly changed my mind,” Kaito decides with a flat voice. “And don’t say shit like that! You’re making me sound like some sort of creepy perv or something.”

“Then don’t act like one.”

“Hah?!”

Kokichi grins and laughs into his elbow whilst Kaito lectures him as they leave the library. Kokichi is in such a good mood that the sudden appearance of Monokuma standing by the exit startles him a little more than it should. The bear looks up at them both with a monstrous smile.

“What the fuck is this?” Kaito murmurs. “When did this teddy bear get here?”

“Who are you calling a teddy bear?!”

Kaito lets out a tragically unmanly scream and tries to hide himself behind Kokichi, which isn’t the smartest idea due to the drastic height difference. Kokichi sighs as Kaito grips his shoulders and crouches down behind him.

“O-Ouma, who the fuck said that?” Kaito asks nervously. “D-Did that toy just speak?”

“Oh the audacity!” Monokuma throws his paws into the air. “I’ve taken time out of my very busy day to greet you and you insult me by calling me a toy? I shouldn’t have even bothered!”

Kokichi swallows as Kaito lifts his head up curiously. “Huh? You’re here to…greet us?” A pause. “Wait! Are you the one responsible for us waking up here?!”

Kaito clearly doesn’t care that a two foot bear is currently jeering at them both anymore. He jabs a finger angrily at Monokuma, who smiles even wider. “Hey, you’re being awfully rude to your headteacher, you know?”

“Headteacher?!” Kaito’s fist twitches. “You’re a bear!”

“Good observation, spaceman,” Monokuma says. “But I’m not just any bear! I’m Monokuma! Headteacher of the Ultimate Academy for Gifted Juveniles!”

“What the fuck?” Kaito turns to Kokichi and lowers his voice. “Dude, what the fuck is going on?”

“How should I know?” Kokichi whispers back all the while staring at Monokuma strangely.

“I’ll explain everything if you follow me to the gym. The rest of your classmates are waiting for you both,” Monokuma says.

Kaito clearly doesn’t want his reputation to be completely destroyed so he huffs and follows Monokuma with a clenched jaw. Kokichi supposes he should feel a little flattered that Kaito expectantly waits for him to follow.

“You okay, man? You look a little pale,” Kaito whispers as they near the gym. “If you’re worried about Monokuma or whatever his name fucking is then don’t worry, I’ll sort him out! I’m gonna give that bear a piece of my mind for putting us here!”

“Maybe Momo-chan should hear him out first?” Kokichi suggests instead. “There’s no point pissing him off right away. We don’t even know what his intentions are.” *Liar.*

“Tsk.” Kaito crosses his arms. “Fuck that. Did you see the way he was grinning at us before? There’s nothing more in world I want right now than to wipe that bear’s smug grin off his stupid little face.”

Kokichi feels like his stomach has knotted itself over and over again as he enters the gym, a sickly feeling washing over him as he settles near the back of the room. He raises a brow when Tsumugi dramatically steps from the shadows to stand next to him with a very pleased smile on her face.

“When did he decide to show himself?” Kokichi hisses. “Did he actually figure out what’s going on?”

Tsumugi shakes her head. “He realised that waiting around is just going to be a waste of time and,” Tsumugi’s smile stretches, “the sooner we start the game, the better.”

Kokichi scowls at her before turning his attention to the stage which Monokuma is standing on.

He doesn’t even need to listen to him properly to know that he’s announcing something horrible to the group. All it takes is one look of everyone’s mixed expressions to know that Monokuma has dragged them all to Hell.

Tenko looks like she doesn’t know whether to scream or cry whilst Miu does those exact things simultaneously. Ryoma is glaring daggers at the bear whilst Kirumi’s jaw locks in irritation. Korekiyo looks scarily calm as he rubs his chin in intrigue. Next to him, Gonta’s eyes go wide in horror. Angie has started praying whilst Kiibo’s face darkens.

Kaito stupidly clenches his fist and declares that he’s going to destroy Monokuma. The bear laughs at him.

To Kokichi’s left, Tsumugi’s eyes swirl in excitement.

Yeah, it’s pretty obvious that everyone is fucked.

Kokichi’s eyes snap to the stage when Monokuma announces something that completely takes him by surprise.

“I did have a very kind motive planned,” Monokuma admits as he continues his reign of terror. “You see, I did plan to let one of you get a freebie of sorts but with the amount of students left...”

“Stop talking! Please stop talking!” Tenko pleads as she covers her ears. “Tenko doesn’t want to believe a word you’re saying!”

Monokuma starts speaking even louder. “And the fact that you’ve all done practically nothing for an entire day, well, that’s not very entertaining now is it?”

“What are you saying?” Kirumi asks.

“Well I know how hard it is for someone to step up and be the first killer so...” Monokuma gleefully spreads his arms out. “Let’s cut the chase, shall we? You all have two days to kill one of

your fellow classmates. Failure to do so and I'll kindly show you all how sharp my claws really are!"

"Are you saying that if no one dies in the next two days then...you'll kill us all?" Kiibo asks in disbelief. He looks around the room anxiously, hoping that he's hearing the same thing as everyone else.

"I'll kill every student forced into this killing game with my own two paws," Monokuma promises.

Kokichi sucks in a small breath. "Shirogane? Did you know about this? About the time limit?"

"Of course!" Tsumugi answers breathlessly. There's a drop of drool running down her chin. "Isn't this *wonderful*?"

Kokichi doesn't entertain her with an answer.

"Cut the bullshit!" Kaito storms towards the stage with fire in his eyes. "There's no fucking way any of us will kill anyone to leave so fuck you and fuck your stupid killing game!"

"My, my, what language!" Monokuma jeers. "Keep it up and I'll drop the time limit from two days to one!"

"You wouldn't dare," Kaito snaps back.

He *does*. "You all now have twenty four hours to show me a dead body!"

"Are you fucking serious?!" All the colour drains from Kaito's face. "You can't just-"

"Twelve hours!"

"For fucks sake Momota! *Shut the fuck up!*" Miu smacks his arm.

"You were just kidding about dropping the time limit, right?" Tenko asks nervously, fiddling with one of her braids frantically. "That was just a joke, *right*?"

"Oh no, I was being *deadly* serious," Monokuma responds and his red eye glows just a little brighter.

Ryoma looks like he wants to be literally anywhere else but here. "Christ..."

"Gonta sorry but Gonta no can kill people!" Gonta's hands tremble violently. "But Gonta no want to die either so...so please just tell us another way to leave! There no need for anyone to die!"

"What? You want me to host a killing game without the killing?" Monokuma gasps. "How bold! How different! How utterly stupid! It almost makes me want to drop the time limit to six hours!"

"Don't!" Kirumi quickly interjects. If she clenches her jaw any tighter then it might lock into place. "We all understand what you want so please...please just leave us be."

Monokuma pauses and for one nauseating moment Kokichi is convinced that the bear is going to laugh in her face and drop the time limit down to six hours regardless of her pleas. However, the bear must decide to take pity and gives the group an excited smile

"Very well then."

He finally leaves and when he does the room is thrown into chaos.

In the middle of it all, Kokichi stares at where Monokuma had stood with a blank expression.

...tch.

Kokichi Ouma - Chapter 1 Part 5

Chapter Notes

Just a warning but this chapter is probably going to be one of the darkest ones in this fic. TW for talks of suicide and extreme gaslighting. If either of these things make you uncomfortable then I'd probably give this chapter a miss. Read with caution and take breaks if needed.

Thank you to anyone who commented on the previous chapter, means a lot!

Have a nice day!

“Why couldn’t you have kept ya fucking mouth shut!” Miu paces back and forth angrily, her heeled boots clacking against the floor noisily. She tugs helplessly on her hair. “Now we’re all going to die because of *this* asshole!”

Kaito’s face turns red as Miu glares at him. “How is any of this *my* fault?! I wasn’t the one who trapped us here!”

“Well if you kept quiet then that piece of shit bear or whatever the hell it is wouldn’t have dropped the time limit!” Miu retorts. “So good fucking job ya tactless virgin!”

“That’s enough you two,” Kirumi says before sighing. “Arguing isn’t going to get us anywhere.”

“And no one in this room is to blame for the situation we’re in,” Ryoma adds as he tugs on his hat. “So enough blaming each other already.”

“Tch...” Miu puts her hands on her hips. “I’ll blame whoever the fuck thank you very much. If Momota hadn’t started arguing then at least we’d have more time to think about what the hell we should do next! Now we have a goddamn time limit of all things breathing down our fucking necks.”

“M-Maybe Monokuma trying to trick us?” Gonta suggests as he wipes cold sweat from his brow. “He have no right to kill us so maybe he just say he will to try and make us kill! But Gonta also promise he won’t kill anyone here! Killing is not gentlemanly and Gonta is gentleman!”

“Who the fuck cares if you’re a gentleman?” Miu snaps. “And what does it matter if he’s just trying to trick us! I don’t want to be around here long enough to find out if he is or not!”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Kirumi asks as her brows furrow together. “Iruma, you’re not thinking of doing something rash, are you? I can assure you that whilst twelve hours doesn’t seem that long, I promise that we have ample time to sit down and discuss-”

Miu lets out a manic snort. “Hah? You want to sit down and have a little tea party and talk? Were you dropped on your head as a baby or were you born stupid? How the *fuck* is talking going to solve anything?”

“We can think of a plan or something,” Tenko answers with a frown. “Iruma, Tenko understands that you’re upset but yelling at Tojo isn’t helping! Tenko thinks that you should apologise and-”

“Ugh! None of you fuckers are listening to me!” Miu tugs furiously on her hair. “You can all do whatever the hell you all want but keep me out of it! I’ve got a fucking door I need to blast open!”

She storms out of the gym before anyone can get another word in. The doors slam loudly against the walls before clattering close, both doors wobbling before becoming still. There’s an incredibly awkward pause before Kiibo speaks up.

“S-Should someone go after her?” Kiibo presses two fingers together. “I understand that she could’ve worded her worries a little nicer but I think she’s just scared.”

“I think we all are,” Kirumi says before casting her eye around the room. “But that doesn’t excuse *any* of us from acting out. Arguments like the that just happened are only a waste of time. Before I was interrupted I was going to say that we should sit down and discuss a plan to keep us all safe. The time limit is very soon and I’m under the presumption that no one plans to kill, correct?”

“O-Of course!” Gonta pumps his fists. “Everyone! *Please* don’t turn to murder! Gonta knows that Monokuma wants us to kill but we can’t do that! Gonta...Gonta rather die than hurt anyone else here!”

“Woah, woah, woah, take it easy!” Kaito’s eyes flash in alarm. “No one here is going to die so don’t talk like that!”

“How can Kaito be so sure that no one is going to die, hmm?” Angie peers up at him curiously. “Temptation is such an awful thing, you know? Angie knows plenty of people who have been swayed by it and have caused a lot of pain for other people. Angie’s God says as long as we don’t let temptation consume us then we’ll be fine!”

“So your God is saying that if we don’t kill then we’ll be okay?” Tenko chews her lip. “But Monokuma said...”

“Monokuma said a lot of things,” Ryoma says before sighing. “He just wants a dead body, right?”

“Don’t say something like that so casually!” Kaito grumbles before pouting. “But...yeah, that’s what he wants. Why?”

Ryoma pauses before shoving his hands into his pockets. He gives the room a resigned look before sighing once more. “If...if we reach the time limit and things are still looking bad then I’ll just, you know-”

“No, Tenko *doesn’t* know,” Tenko says as her eyes start to shine dangerously with frustrated tears. “And Tenko doesn’t want you to even finish that sentence because if Hoshi is saying what Tenko is thinking then-”

“No one here is doing anything drastic,” Kirumi says firmly. The glare she shoots at Ryoma is stern enough that he turns his head to the side with a click of his tongue. “So I don’t want to hear any discussion of killing whether it be sacrificing another student or sacrificing yourself.”

“I’m just saying,” Ryoma murmurs with an exhausted tilt of his head. “I have no one waiting for me outside of this school. No one at all. Even if we all do escape then I’m just going to go straight back to prison for a very long time.”

“That doesn’t mean that you should die!” Tenko insists. “So cut it out before...before Tenko knocks some sense into you!”

“I truly have nothing to live for,” Ryoma reiterates. “You all do. I’d be selfish to let you all die just

for the sake of keeping me alive.”

“Are you even listening to what you’re saying?!” Kaito stomps towards the tennis player with a clenched jaw. “You think *you’ll* be being selfish if you don’t die for all of us but that’s fucking wrong! Don’t try and glorify your stupid desire to die as a way of saving us.”

“*Momota!*” Kirumi snaps at him sharply. “There are nicer ways of wording-”

“It’s okay, Tojo,” Ryoma murmurs. “I don’t need people to sugar coat what they truly mean.”

“But still...” Tenko narrows her eyes. “Momota is being very insensitive right now!”

“I’m just saying what needs to be said!” Kaito insists. His fist trembles by his thigh. “...tch. Forget it. I still mean everything I said. We’re either all leaving here together or not at all. Anyone who dies here will have only died because of Monokuma and I’m not giving the bear the fucking satisfaction of having any of our blood on his stupid little paws.”

“And I’m serious about what I said too,” Ryoma says. “I couldn’t care less if my death means a win for Monokuma. If the time limit runs out then you’ll all die regardless and I’d rather only have one of us die than us all.”

“Why you...” Kaito’s shoulders tense and it’s difficult to tell if he’s going to walk over to Ryoma and punch him or not.

“This is what Angie meant by temptation taking over, you know?” Angie says, clasping her hands together by her back. “Ryoma’s desire to die has already caused one argument and arguing always leads to something much worse.”

Kaito raises an eyebrow. “Just because we’re disagreeing over something doesn’t mean I’m going to fucking kill him!”

“But someone else might,” Angie says. “Because Monokuma talked about how there’s a class trial after a death, right? He said if the killer gets away with murder then they get to leave!”

“Someone could very well kill Hoshi and we’ll presume it was just a suicide,” Kirumi realises quietly. “And then we’d all die...”

“No one here is selfish enough to do that!” Kaito insists but his brows crease with worry. “...right?”

Ryoma looks unusually frustrated about something. “...just what sort of hell did we wake up in?”

“We can’t be in hell! Tenko is too good of a person to be in hell!” Tenko declares. “Besides, you only go to hell if you’re dead and none of us are!”

“I think he was being metaphorical,” Korekiyo reassures her. “But even I have to agree that this situation must be akin to being in hell. I wonder, why are we hated so much to be here in the first place? I doubt that Monokuma picked us randomly to play his game.”

“Gonta have no enemies outside of walls!” Gonta says. “Gonta also not meet Monokuma before either so Gonta not know how Monokuma knows him!”

“We’re Ultimates, we’re all over the internet,” Kiibo responds. “The entire world knows who we are in some way or another.”

“That’s right, we’re all Ultimates here,” Tsumugi says as she starts counting everyone in the room.

“Yep, every single one of us.”

“Why would a person, no, a *bear* like Monokuma be on the internet in the first place?” Korekiyo ponders. “Actually, it’s rather presumptuous to presume that Monokuma is functioning alone since he’s a robot, correct?”

“Kiibo runs fine,” Tenko points out.

Kiibo’s lip wobbles. “Please don’t make me sound like I’m just some computer.”

“Perhaps someone is controlling Monokuma?” Korekiyo suggests. “And they’re the person pulling the strings behind the scenes. I doubt a robot bear like Monokuma is running this game alone.”

“If that is true then once I find that person I’m going to punch them into next week, no, next *year!*” Kaito promises as he cracks his knuckles. “How dare someone put us in a game like this!”

Kirumi sighs. “Excuse me but we’re getting completely off track. We have a time limit to worry about, remember? Even if it is someone else who is controlling Monokuma we should still be wary of him. He’s the one who has claws sharp enough to seriously injure us all, remember?”

“I say we just kill him before he kills us!” Kaito proposes. “He’s just some dumb robot bear, right? It shouldn’t be that hard to just, I don’t know, break him with something heavy?”

“Are you implying that all robots are dumb?” Kiibo asks before huffing. “Because if that’s the case then-”

“Oh, that’s right! You’re a robot too, aren’t you?!” Kaito turns to Kiibo excitedly. “So you should know what a robot’s weakness is, right? How do you think we should break Monokuma?!”

“When did we decide we were going to break him in the first place?” Tsumugi asks worriedly. “A- And how do we not know that there’s, um, spares of him lying around somewhere? I doubt that Monokuma only has just one body to use.”

Kaito blinks. “If there were spares of him lying around then we would’ve found them by now, right?”

“Not if there are areas of the school we don’t know about,” Korekiyo says. “And it would be foolish of us to presume that we’ve seen the entirety of the school already.”

“Well shit...” Kaito mumbles under his breath before clearing his throat. “Then we’re just going to have to presume that Monokuma is the only Monokuma around for now. We don’t have time to waste on worrying about what ifs. Now, Kiibo-”

“Robots have plenty of weaknesses,” Kiibo says with a dejected smile. He stares sourly at Kaito. “Extreme heat, extreme cold, buttons, the material they’re built from...”

“Angie didn’t see any buttons on Monokuma,” Angie says before bobbing her head from side to side. “But, but, is killing Monokuma the right answer? We’re solving getting out of killing by killing so-”

“This is different,” Kaito insists. “Monokuma is only a robot-”

“I’d like to make it very clear that I’ve recorded every single one of your robophobic remarks and I *will* be taking you to court,” Kiibo says with a determined glare.

“-so it’s kind of like just breaking a computer or something,” Kaito continues. Clearly he didn’t listen to a single thing Kiibo said. “Besides, it’s either him or us!”

“I doubt that Monokuma is just going to let us kill him though,” Tsumugi says before shuddering. “C-Can we say we’re breaking him instead too? Saying that we’re going to kill him makes me feel sick.”

“Oh you *poor* thing!” Tenko coos before wrapping her arm around Tsumugi’s shoulders. “Don’t worry, Shirogane! Tenko promises that she’ll try her best to keep you and all the girls here safe!”

“And the boys?” Korekiyo hints.

Tenko sneers at him. “Can perish.”

“I do hope that was a joke,” Kirumi sighs, putting a hand to her head. “I understand that you all might have reasons to not like each other but it’s important that we work together to leave. You can all have as many petty squabbles as you’d like once we leave but for now please just try and get along for the sake of escaping.”

“Gonta thinks we should get along because we’re all friends, right?” Gonta asks hopefully. “Gonta has already decided that everyone is his friend so-”

“How can you decide that we’re all your friends so quickly?” Korekiyo asks curiously. “You don’t know any of us personally, correct? For all you know you could be befriending a secret mass murderer.”

Gonta grimaces. “Then Gonta have to trust that...that his new friends are nice people. Gonta at least hopes that he gets to spend next twelve hours in good company. Things could be lot worse right now because we could all be alone and Gonta think that...dying alone is worst way to go.”

“You’re right,” Tsumugi agrees with a distant look in her eyes. “Dying alone...there’s nothing more despairing than that, right? At least we all have each other so if anything bad does happen in the end then...”

“You all gotta stop thinking so negatively!” Kaito grits his teeth. “I’ve already decided that no one is going to die today so that means we’re all going to live!”

“So once you decide something then that’s it?” Ryoma asks doubtfully.

Kaito nods stiffly. “Yeah, that’s right! I believe we’re getting out of here one way or another so until then everyone needs to quit whining and at least fucking try to be optimistic.”

“Oh Kaito, you’re so naïve!” Angie says a little too cheerfully. “Of course Angie wants to be optimistic but sometimes there’s also a need to be realistic too! Angie thinks that the best place for her to be right now is her room so she can talk with her God.”

“Wait, hold on a second!” Kaito’s jaw hangs open as Angie happily skips from the room a little too quickly. “You can’t just leave!”

“Why not? It’s not as if you’re in charge,” Korekiyo says before crossing his arms. “I too also plan to retreat to my room just for now. If we truly do only have twelve hours left to live then...there’s a couple of things I need to do before then.”

“Like what?!” Kaito narrows his eyes. “What’s more important than helping me get rid of Monokuma?!”

“It’s personal,” Korekiyo admits before tucking a loose strand of hair behind his ear. “Now if you would excuse me.”

“Are you fucking serious?” Kaito mutters to himself in disbelief. “Is there anyone else who wants to leave, huh?”

“...yep,” Ryoma mutters before following Korekiyo from the room with a lazy wave from over his shoulder.

Kiibo awkwardly pulls a face. “I actually want to check on Iruma so...”

“Just go,” Kaito sighs, running a hand through his hair.

Kaito starts to look rather resigned once he realises he’s left with a rather small group of people. Tsumugi clears her throat nervously. “Um, Momota? What are you actually planning on doing exactly?”

“I,” Kaito pumps a fist, “don’t know yet but I’m sure I’ll figure something out!”

“Tenko thinks she should just punch Monokuma into pieces!” Tenko decides as she waves her hands around frantically. “Tenko has never had the chance to use her neo aikido on machinery yet so this will be the perfect chance for her to practice!”

“I highly doubt that Monokuma is going to let us break him,” Kirumi says. “Didn’t he also mention that there’s some rules we have to follow?”

“He gave us a tablet each, right?” Tsumugi says as she pulls her own from her pocket. “And, um, from the looks of it...yeah, I thought so. Hurting Monokuma will mean we’ll be breaking a rule and I don’t want to get punished so...”

“We won’t have to worry about the rules if Monokuma isn’t around to enforce them so don’t worry about it!” Kaito reassures her with a thumbs up. “Besides, I’ll take full responsibility for everything!”

“Are you sure about that?” Kirumi asks hesitantly. “Monokuma made it clear that if we break any of the rules then we’ll be punished accordingly and I don’t think he’s just going to give us a slap on the wrists for breaking him.”

“That’s only if he comes back anyway,” Kaito says with a dismissive wave of his hand.

“Tenko hasn’t seen any spares of him lying around so...” Tenko takes a deep breath. “Tenko thinks that breaking him is the only way forward! If we all manage to break Monokuma before the time limit then everything will be okay! Tenko is confident that we’ll all be fine!”

“If you put it like that then I can’t help but feel that you’re probably right,” Tsumugi says with a small smile. “Aren’t you relieved too, Ouma?”

Gonta blinks in surprise. “Ouma been so quiet that Gonta forgot he was here with rest of us!”

“You’re not worried, are you?” Kirumi asks with a concerned frown. “Whilst I understand that Momota’s plan is very...risky, perhaps getting rid of Monokuma *is* the only way forward at this point. Well, unless Iruma is able to break down the door and secure us an exit.”

“Tenko thinks that exit is too good to be true from the sounds of it,” Tenko says as she wrinkles her nose. “So Tenko thinks that getting rid of Monokuma is the best course of action!”

“If that what everyone want to do then Gonta also help!” Gonta declares. “If everyone capture Monokuma then Gonta can break him into pieces so he can’t be put back together again!”

“Nah, that won’t work,” Kaito responds with a shake of his head. “I already said that I’m going to take full responsibility for this so I have to be the one who breaks Monokuma.”

“Oh, so you *are* worried about the rules then?” Tsumugi asks with a blink. “But I thought you said that they won’t matter once Monokuma is gone.”

“Yeah, well...” Kaito rubs the back of his head. “You know, just as a precaution anyway...I should be the one who breaks him.”

“What if we all break him together?” Gonta suggests. “That way if Monokuma does come back then he not know which one of us to punish!”

“I’m under the presumption that he’ll just kill everyone instead,” Kirumi responds gently. “However, Momota...”

“Yeah?”

Kirumi looks rather uncomfortable as she clasps her hands firmly down by her waist. “You berated Hoshi for offering himself up to die for the rest of us but now you’re doing the same thing. Aren’t you being a little hypocritical?”

“Huh? What the hell are you on about?” Kaito places a fist to his hip. “This is completely different-”

“How is it different?” Kirumi asks before sighing. “You’re offering to take responsibility for all of us and Hoshi offered to do the same thing. I’m afraid your double standards are rather...difficult to accept. Whilst I agree that Monokuma must be dealt with, the way you’re wording things leaves a rather sour taste in my mouth.”

She somehow manages to stun him into silence momentarily. Kaito looks at her as if she’s grown a second head before he throws his head to the side almost childishly. “Tch, it’s like I said. This is completely different. He’s only saying he’ll die for us because he wants to die. I don’t. I want to fucking live god damn it.”

“Then why place such a responsibility on your shoulders?” Kirumi asks. “Why risk so much and not let anyone else do the same?”

“Because keeping your team safe is the number one thing you should do when in a situation like this!” Kaito licks his lips. “And that means keeping everyone safe, whether that be from potential dangers or even from themselves!”

“Gonta think he understand what Momota is saying but Momota didn’t have to be so mean to Hoshi,” Gonta says. “Only Hoshi can understand the sadness he feels and if Hoshi feels so sad that he wants to die then...shouldn’t we be at least kinder to him? That way Hoshi might feel something else, something that isn’t despair for even just a little bit.”

“Tenko is impressed that a male could say such a compassionate thing,” Tenko says with a nod of her head. “But Gonta is right! Tenko understands that she’s very vocal about her distaste for boys but that doesn’t mean she actually wants you all to die!”

“And as for working as a team...” Kirumi gives the room a humble smile. “It’s only fair that we split the responsibility of destroying Monokuma equally. A team leader should take the brunt of

any responsibility when it comes down to it but we're all equals here, therefore meaning when it comes down to it everyone will be as responsible as each other for Monokuma being destroyed, not just one person."

"But..." Kaito has a distant look in his eyes before it's veiled over with a bright shine. "No, you're right. We'll take Monokuma down as a team!"

"Just us in this room?" Tsumugi asks as she starts to count the remaining students. "That leaves me, Momota, Tojo, Chabashira, Gonta and Ouma. Are us six enough to destroy Monokuma?"

"Count me out," Kokichi says abruptly, resting his hands behind his head.

"Hah?" Kaito's grin falters. "You've kept quiet all this time and that's the first thing you say? That you don't even want to be involved?"

"Do I have to be?" Kokichi responds, raising an eyebrow.

"Well, *no*, but-"

"If you all want to destroy Monokuma then be my guest," Kokichi says before giving the room a dry look, making sure that Tsumugi in particular gets the brunt of it. "But even if he gets destroyed then he'll probably just get replaced with something else or he'll just get brought back."

"But that might not happen!" Gonta insists. "If we time everything right then we can break Monokuma just before time limit! Even if he come back then time limit will have passed anyway so he won't be able to-"

"He'll just give us another time limit," Kokichi says. "And then another one and another one. Besides, he could be listening in on us for all any of you know. He's probably laughing at you all right now."

"Why you..." Kaito's eyes darken. "That's not-"

"He probably expected some of you to fight back," Kokichi continues. "Which is probably the only reason *why* he hasn't returned to punish you all already. He probably thinks it's funny that you all think you can just get rid of him like that. He's already managed to bring eleven of us to a secluded location and force us into a killing game. If I thought getting rid of him was as easy as breaking him then I would've suggested it the moment he left the room."

"Then why wait this long to voice your concerns?" Kirumi asks. "If you don't want to join us then that's fine but-"

"I just wanted to see if you were all stupid enough to go along with such an idea and it looks like you all are," Kokichi answers.

Kaito stares at him incredulously. "What's your problem?!"

"My problem is that I'm surrounded by absolute morons who are acting like everything can be solved after having one measly conversation," Kokichi answers. He blinks slowly. "I was hoping that at least one of you would realise how bad this idea is but clearly I was expecting a little too much."

"Then what do you think we should do then?" Tsumugi asks as she throws her hand to her chest. Her eyes look watery yet it's clear to him that she's putting on an act. Kokichi wonders how much fun she's having right now acting like she's the victim. "If we're all so wrong then what should we

do?!”

“How should I know?” Kokichi asks before clearing his throat with a knowing smile. “What do you think we should do, Shirogane?”

Tsumugi’s eyes sparkle from under her glasses momentarily. Is she enjoying this? Does she like this little game of cat and mouse? The sparkle is quickly snuffed out as her eyes begin to rapidly water. “I-I don’t know! I just...I just want to get out of here! If breaking Monokuma is our only way to escape then that’s what we’ll do! We’ll break him into so many pieces that he can’t be put back together again!”

Is she purposefully luring people into a trap? No, that’s not right. What she’s doing is creating a trail towards despair, dropping tiny breadcrumbs that everyone is naively following in desperation. She must know that going after Monokuma is going to be a waste of time. If she was *actually* worried about him being broken then she would’ve put a stop to the conversation herself ages ago.

She really is just milking the situation for what it’s worth. She’s betting on the fact that everyone is desperate enough to do stupid and drastic things. What’s even worse is that she’s winning. She’s already got a small group of people distracted enough from the reality of the situation. What’s confusing is why is she allowing everyone to do something so stupid? If they do break Monokuma then who *is* going to enforce the rules? Kokichi doubts Tsumugi is going to suddenly reveal herself as Monokuma’s partner.

Just what is she up to? Surely she knows that if everyone dies then she won’t get her precious killing game. Well, maybe that is for the best too. If everyone is dead then she can’t torment them any further. But, *ugh*, dying isn’t an option Kokichi really wants to take. He can’t beat Tsumugi at her own game and laugh in her face when he does if he’s dead.

He bites the inside of his mouth as he watches Tsumugi start to pretend to break down. If she’s truly not worried about everyone breaking Monokuma then that must mean there’s spares of him somewhere, right? But that’s not something he needs to be worrying about right now.

What’s the most concerning is...how confident Tsumugi is right now. She’s playing her role as the plain girl who just wants to leave perfectly. She has everyone wrapped around her finger and she’s toying with every single person in the room right now.

It’s just, there’s no way that she’s going to let everyone die so early on, right? So why isn’t she trying to instigate some sort of fight? Why didn’t she fan the flames of the argument Kaito, Ryoma and Angie were having? Shouldn’t her priority right now be making sure a murder actually *does* happen? Or...is she confident that someone is going to snap without her influence?

Just what the hell does she have planned? It’s not like...it’s not like she can kill someone herself and get away with it, right? Because if she kills someone now then she’ll be punished and Kokichi doubts that’s something she wants. Tsumugi thrives from feeling despair, causing other people to despair. She’s going to want to watch this game pan out to the bitter end.

The looming thoughts of what if this and what if that makes it feel like someone has poured icy water over his head. All he can do is just stand around and speculate and wait for a cruelly deduced time limit to creep closer and closer. If no one dies then they’re all dead but if someone dies then that means the game will start and that just won’t do at all. The real problem is that he has no fucking clue how to stop the game, how to prevent a murder from happening. He’s not God, he can’t control everyone. Hell, does he even want to try? What’s stopping someone from plunging a knife into his back?

And what's it with everyone acting so high and mighty? Why does everyone think they have the right to such luxuries like morals? It's so fucking curious how Ryoma basically offers himself up on a silver platter yet everyone is still ignorant enough to think that saving him will save everyone else too. Kaito is probably the worst culprit of them all, saying that he'll take sole responsibility over everyone yet he's only known everyone for a couple of hours. Who does he think he is waltzing around acting like he's some hero sent from Heaven itself?

He's surrounded by people who value friendship over survival so it seems. What sort of spoiled lives did everyone live to think that holding hands and spouting about friendship is enough to save them? Are they all stupid enough to think that help is actually coming? If someone really wanted to help them all then they would've done so by now.

It just drives him mad realising all he can do right now is speculate, speculate, speculate. He knew Monokuma was going to give them a motive of some sort but a *time limit*? A twelve hour fucking time limit? That took him by surprise, especially since Monokuma practically goaded Kaito into making the limit shorter and shorter. It's almost as if Monokuma *wants* to kill everyone.

"W-Why aren't you saying anything?" Tsumugi asks with a thick voice. She's choking back on some very false tears. "Is it because I'm right? That breaking Monokuma is the right option? S-Stop acting like you're better than everyone else! I bet you're just as scared as everyone else here but you're too stubborn to admit it! P-People like you are the worst!"

Ah, so she really is just going to act like she's the victim. Kokichi wonders how much fun Tsumugi is having pretending that she's actually human and not some monster ready to plunge strangers into the darkest pits of hell just because she can.

"Is that so?" Kokichi says. "Well, I suppose Shirogane-chan is entitled to her own opinion. If you all want to spend your last hours alive doing something utterly stupid then please, by my guest. It won't bother me in the *slightest* when your half baked plan blows back up in your faces."

Liar.

He prays to any God that is listening that Tenko doesn't spot him as he slips into the girl's bathroom. Hopefully she's still in the gym with the others discussing how they're going to not only capture Monokuma but also dismantle him to the point of disrepair. Well, good luck to them. If they miraculously do manage to succeed then Kokichi will eat his own hands.

It's a little less scary being in the bathroom now that it's daytime. Being in the room during night had made all the shadows in the room look a little darker and stretch a little taller. He swallows and creeps towards the wall that he saw swing open and presses around gently on random tiles. If someone walks in on him now then even he doubts he can tell a lie believable enough to explain him being here.

He finds it a little embarrassing how his eyes go wide when he somehow manages to press down just right. The wall collapses open and he gives the hidden hallway a dumbfounded look before clearing his throat. It's just, ah, why is there so much dried up blood? It looks like the walls and floors were stained with it days ago, maybe even longer than that. The fact that Tsumugi had looked thrilled when she had spotted the mess really makes Kokichi question her sanity even more.

With a final deep breath he takes a step forward, only for his eyes to shoot open when he hears the unmissable sound of the bathroom door creaking open. He freezes as he turns his head slowly to face the door, blinking when he spots Angie of all people staring back at him with an equal look of

surprise.

Quite frankly, her contribution of only saying 'um' is a fair enough response at this point. Kokichi clears his throat and straightens his back, preparing a very sloppy 'this isn't what it looks like' speech when Angie beats him to it.

"Is that dried blood?" Angie asks with morbid curiosity. "Aw man, what a waste! Angie could've used that blood as a donation!"

Kokichi blinks with a surprised smile. Haha, what the *fuck*? "Um, what are you doing here?"

"Shouldn't it be Angie asking that?" Angie responds. "Because this is the girl's bathroom and last time Angie checked, um, Kokichi isn't a girl so..." She peers past him, looking further down the hallway. "And why is Kokichi heading down a super creepy hallway on his own? Does he have a secret lair he hasn't told any of us about?"

"Something like that!" Kokichi agrees. Shit. Fuck. Fucking shit. "So..."

"Woah, Angie totally wants to check it out then!" Angie decides as she pushes past him and strolls down the dark hallway with not a care in the world. Kokichi follows her incredulously and realises about halfway down that if he wasn't so stunned by Angie walking headfirst into potential danger then he'd probably be having a very bad time with the blood and the cramped halls.

The room they end up in is filled with lavish couches that have plenty of plush pillows stacked on them. There's a coffee table with some cutlery on it and a bin in the corner that's been tipped on its side. His eyes water as he spots what looks to be rotten food slopped all over the floor. Due to how old and off the food is it's easy to spot the disgustingly stringy texture the food has taken. It looks like a mix match of brown and green and off yellow goo.

There's also pieces of jagged glass by the food, some pieces pressed together and some put to the side. He crouches by the glass and frowns. One of the pieces has dried blood on it. Did someone cut themselves on it? He notices a coiled up piece of plastic by the food and picks it up between two fingers, grimacing as a lump of slop slides down it slowly.

It's a label for poison. Kokichi blinks slowly at it. It feels like all the air has been sucked from the room, that he's suddenly turned into a house of cards and a particularly heavy gust of wind has knocked into him, leaving him to crumble and making him breathless. He's fairly confident his fear doesn't show on his face as Angie cluelessly skips around him, pointing out something that he doesn't hear.

Another glob of slop splatters on the floor by his feet and the next blink he does finally brings him back into the room. He can finally hear Angie blabbering about something, he can finally smell the absolute rotten smell coming from the food, he can finally feel the slimy texture of the label between his fingers. He drops the plastic onto the floor as if it suddenly turned white hot. It rolls up into itself on top of several shards of broken plate.

"Kokichi? Kokichi, yoo hoo!" Angie waves a hand in front of his face. He can tell by her stiff posture that she's doing everything in her power to not have to look at the food herself. "Angie was asking if you know why this giant floating head looks like Monokuma!"

He turns around to face what she's pointing at. It's honestly a damn mystery how he managed to miss it in the first place. There's a giant Monokuma head sitting directly in the centre of the room. It's beady eyes blink slowly ever so often. However, it doesn't seem to be looking at anything or anyone in particular. Perhaps it's just on some sort of stand by mode?

“Um, excuse me! You’re sorta like Monokuma right?” Angie asks as she places herself in front of the head. She leans forward, hands held tightly behind her back. “Yoo hoo, earth to big Monokuma head! Angie is trying to ask you something!”

Kokichi continues to stare incredulously as Angie circles the head, letting out various noises of intrigue and mystery. What is she actually doing? Is she not scared that the head might, well, try to bite her or something ridiculous like that?

“So, um, Angie has decided that you’re just being really rude right now so...” Angie presses her lips together. “Well, Angie is just wondering if you could, like, stop the game now? Angie doesn’t want to play a game where she can’t win and Angie doesn’t like losing.”

Kokichi almost snorts at her request. He’s finding it almost impossible to figure out if she’s really, *really* stupid or just tragically hopeful that her plea might work. He pauses to see if the giant Monokuma head will really answer her but he’s not all that surprised when they’re met with silence. He picks himself up from the floor, legs crying out in relief after being bent for so long.

“Either the head is too dumb to speak of it’s just ignoring you,” Kokichi tells her. “*Or* it thinks you’re stupid for even asking to be able to leave in the first place.”

Angie pouts. “But when Angie asks for something she usually...” Her fists tremble childishly. Kokichi is reminded of a kid having a tantrum. “This thing is bigger than Monokuma so this is just Monokuma’s, like, boss, right? If Monokuma won’t stop the game then maybe this will!”

He pinches the bridge of his nose. Of course...of course he’s literally surrounded by the most *naïve* and most *stupid* and most *frustrating* idiots on the planet. He doesn’t even have the energy to entertain her with an answer.

The artist looks uncharacteristically annoyed for a moment before she veils her annoyance with a smile. If she hadn’t been so sloppy with her facial features then even Kokichi himself would’ve missed how angry she actually is at the moment. “Please stop looking at Angie as if she’s stupid because Angie is not. There’s nothing wrong with Angie trying to find her own way out of here, no?”

“Hey, I’m not stopping you,” Kokichi responds, raising his hands in mock defeat.

Angie pauses before narrowing her icy blue eyes. “Is Kokichi going to tell Angie how he knew about the secret entrance in the girl’s bathroom or not anyway? Angie is still very curious about that, you know?”

“Ah, well, I have a very reasonable explanation that will explain everything in *excruciating* detail that I will *totally* tell you right now,” Kokichi says before dramatically clearing his throat. “Well, you see...”

Angie tilts her head to the side. “Um, Angie does not see.”

Damn it, usually a promise of a mind numbingly long and boring explanation scares people away. It’s time for plan B then. “I fell through the wall.”

“Kokichi...fell through the wall?” Angie repeats his claim as if she was testing out a new sweet that she didn’t quite agree with, rolling the words around her mouth in confusion. “Angie didn’t realise that we were telling jokes right now!”

“Oh no, I’m being deadly serious!” Kokichi insists. “I totally just, like, slipped and coincidentally clipped through the wall like some sort of glitch! Happens all the time, you see.”

“Angie saw the wall had opened up like a door,” Angie responds. “Why is Kokichi lying? Is it because...” Her eyes trail over to the large Monokuma head and the back at him. “Um, you’re not working with Monokuma, are you?”

“*No!*” He snaps a little too loudly because Angie startles at his sudden declaration. He lazily rests his hands behind his head. “No, I’m *not* and I’ll cut your tongue off if you suggest such a thing again.”

“Aw, but Angie likes her tongue,” Angie says as she oddly tries to cradle said tongue with her hands. “And it’s not Angie’s fault that you’re acting very suspicious right now! If Kokichi doesn’t start telling the truth then Angie is going to curse his family for the next one hundred generations so he should be very careful about what he says next.”

“Well I don’t have a family to curse so bleh, bleh, bleh,” Kokichi childishly responds, sticking his tongue out at her. “And I was totally telling the truth before about how I just fell through the wall! I just tripped and then bam! I was on the floor and then double bam! You walked in as soon as I picked myself up!”

Angie fiddles with a paintbrush inside of her pocket. “If Kokichi is lying then Angie promises that she’ll find a family just for Kokichi to join and then curse them instead.”

“It’s the honestly honest truth!” Kokichi insists.

“But even if it is the truth...” Angie’s eyes snap wide open. “What was Kokichi doing in the girl’s bathroom in the first place?”

“I’m, uh...colour blind?” Kokichi offers as a flimsy answer. “Totally couldn’t tell the difference between the bathroom doors and it’s not like the drawings help either because anyone can wear a dress or trousers nowadays so...”

Angie looks him up and down. “Hmm, even if Kokichi is lying, the way you dress makes Angie think you might be telling the truth since all you’re wearing is black and white.”

Which puts Kokichi in a very awkward situation as Angie looks at his black and white scarf and then at Monokuma. She rubs her chin slowly.

“Wait a second...”

“I can one hundred percent reassure you that Monokuma copied me when it came to our appearances,” Kokichi says with a sniff. “So don’t even suggest that we’re working together just because we have similar colour palettes.”

“It *is* a pretty big coincidence!” Angie responds but the smile hidden in her eyes suggests that she’s not actually fearful of him. “Buuut Angie is just messing with you. If Kokichi really was working with Monokuma then Angie’s God would’ve told her by now.”

“Oh? But how are you so sure that I’m not?” Kokichi asks.

Angie hums. “Well...Angie just sort of has a hunch that Kokichi isn’t the biggest threat around here.”

“So you think I’m a threat?”

“Angie thinks that you’re a *nuisance*,” she answers. “Because half of everything that comes out of your mouth is a lie. But, like, if Kokichi was really evil then he would’ve just killed me by now,

yes?”

“That’s, ah, a rather bold claim,” Kokichi says. “Who says I’m not just waiting for the right moment to strike?”

“Because Kokichi has had plenty of time to kill Angie and,” Angie turns to give the giant Monokuma head a thoughtful look, “God wouldn’t have told Angie to go to the bathroom if he thought she was going to be killed.”

“So you came to the bathroom because...God told you so?” Kokichi pauses. “Sounds pretty weird if you ask-”

“Angie also knows that Kokichi isn’t a threat because he hasn’t accused Angie of being the bad guy,” Angie adds suddenly. “He didn’t try to stop Angie from coming here and has let her explore without looking too nervous. If Kokichi really *didn’t* want me down here then that would’ve been super suspicious.”

...huh, Angie is a lot more interesting than she seems. She’s certainly a lot more observational than he predicted. “Say, what did you used to do before you ended up here?”

“Angie lived on an island with all her people,” Angie says. “She’s an oracle for her God.”

...hmm, interesting. So she’s not exactly a leader but has experience with telling people what to do. “Angie, how does your God know so much?”

“Because he is all knowing,” Angie answers. “And he’d never lie to Angie.”

It’s honestly rather strange how her God knows so much but Kokichi isn’t going to open that can of worms. Maybe there really is a God telling her things. He’s decides it’s not his place to question it any further.

Besides, there’s much more pressing matters right now. He thought coming down here would give him some sort of clue about something but it seems he was wrong. The only suspicious thing here is the Monokuma head and it seems that it wants to keep its lips sealed tight. However, from the looks of things he can’t spot any spare Monokumas lying around so...

“Angie’s disappointed too,” Angie says with a quiet sigh. “She really thought that she’d find something to help her by now.”

“Are you planning on escaping?” Kokichi asks curiously.

Angie pauses. “...Angie...doesn’t know what she wants.”

“Hmm?”

“From the moment Angie woke up her God has been telling her that something is terribly wrong,” Angie says. “And Angie...Angie feels like she’s been here before, like she’s suffering from some horrible *deja vu*.”

Kokichi stares at her with a blank expression. “Is that so?”

“Maybe we’re all just trapped in a horrible nightmare,” Angie says quietly. Her small smile looks horribly out of place. “Angie would really like to wake up now and go home.”

It’s hard to pretend that her childish wish doesn’t hit him like a bulldozer. All he can see is a girl

who wants to go home and hide herself behind her mother's skirts whilst her father fights away all of the monsters. Hidden behind the selfishness and the fake smiles is a human with feelings and a desire to live.

An uncomfortable feeling settles in his stomach and *squeezes*.

"God damn piece of fucking shit, *fuck* that fucking maniac bear and his fucking game!"

Kokichi pauses outside of Miu's lab, crossing his arms as he leans against the door.

"Iruma, please calm down!" Kiibo cries out. "I know the situation we're in isn't ideal but-"

"Isn't ideal? *Isn't ideal?!?*" Miu screeches back. "I'm fucking dead meat, Kiibs! There's fuck all in here that I can use to build anything actually useful and we only have half a damn day to get out of here!"

"Well actually it's a little under half a day now," Kiibo points out quietly.

Miu lets out a frustrated scream. "Shut up, shut up, *shut up!* You don't have to fucking remind me!"

"But it was you who said..." Kiibo hesitates. "Iruma, please believe me when I say I'm just as worried as you. Monokuma giving us such a small time limit was cruel but we need to try and stay calm! There's simply no time to-"

"It was Momota's fault that we barely have enough time to get out of here! If we had two days then I coulda fucking at least tried to build something useful!" Miu swipes her desk clean. "All I've got are stupid fucking blueprints for some shitty balls or whatever! All they do is turn shit off! I need something to blow a door from it's damn hinges!"

"Could you use one of the..." Kiibo pauses as he reads the blueprint. "Electrobombs to power the door off?"

"Of course not! The doors aren't going to magically spring open! They won't be locked anymore but if the doors can't be broken down then there's no hope in getting them open," Miu snaps. She twists a strand of hair around her finger tightly. "Face it, there's no fucking escaping this hell hole."

"But you can't give up hope just yet!" Kiibo clasps her hand tightly. "Iruma, it's far too early to give up-"

"There's always another option," Miu says so quietly that Kokichi almost misses what she said. "That...that bear said if...if you win a class trial then-"

"Iruma! I can't believe you could even suggest such a thing!" Kiibo sounds appropriately horrified. "Killing is *not* an option and I won't allow you to stoop down to such levels!"

"What other choice do I have?!" Miu grabs his shoulders. "Think about it, Kiibs. E-Even if you get destroyed then I can just remake you! I can download everything you need onto a hard drive and-"

"T-This isn't up for discussion!" Kiibo argues. "I refuse to let you end someone else's life, Iruma! Not only is it a horrible thing to even think but you'll also have to live with the fact that you caused someone to die on purpose!"

“B-But if I don’t strike first then...” Miu trembles violently. “Someone might get me instead a-and I really don’t want to fucking die Kiibo. I-I can’t die here!”

She crumbles to her knees, wailing wildly into Kiibo’s stomach. Her crying is ugly and snotty and desperate. It’s the most human cry Kokichi has ever heard. The inventor’s shoulders shake wildly. “I-Iruma...”

“I don’t want to die!” Miu pleads, hiding her face behind her hands. “I can’t die in a place like this! *I-I refuse to rot away in this hell hole!*”

“Y-You won’t!” Kiibo hesitantly promises, patting Miu’s hair awkwardly. “There must be some way to-”

“You don’t understand!” Miu wails. Her voice cracks. “I’ve already wasted so much of my life already! I deserve to live more than any other person here! I just want to go *home!*”

Another fresh set of tears runs down her cheeks. Kokichi pushes himself off the wall and walks away as Kiibo struggles to comfort the distraught inventor.

—

“Ah, Ouma. Excellent timing.”

Kokichi looks up and sees Korekiyo looking down at him expectantly. They’re just outside of the warehouse. “Excellent timing for what? You’re not planning on killing me and hiding my body in the warehouse are you?”

“Of course not,” Korekiyo says as he wrinkles his nose under his mask. “Why would I want to kill someone like you anyway? You certainly don’t meet my standards.”

“Haha, wow, the fact you have those sorts of standards in the first place is kind of weird but okay,” Kokichi responds.

Korekiyo blatantly ignores him. “I am well aware that it’s none of my business and quite frankly I do not care about the outcome of what might happen next but I thought you would like to know that Gonta and Hoshi are currently arguing inside of the warehouse.”

“Eh? You’re telling me that *Gonta* of all people is arguing?” Kokichi tilts his head curiously. “Now this is something I gotta see.”

“I’d intervene but as I said, it’s not any of my business what everyone decides to do with their final hours,” Korekiyo says. “However, a leader such as yourself should be able to diffuse an argument rather quickly, correct?”

“And why do you care about stopping an argument?” Kokichi asks.

“I’m more concerned about what might happen *after* the argument is finished,” Korekiyo admits. “After all, having an argument in a situation like this is only going to escalate into something much worse. Whilst I’d love to observe how everyone is doing being put face to face with such a short time limit, there’s someone I need to talk to before the inevitable happens.”

“Oh? Does Shinguji have a secret girlfriend here?” Kokichi teases.

“Don’t say such childish things,” Korekiyo says dismissively before putting his hands to his chest. “I simply would like to spend my last hours alive with the one I love so if you would excuse me.”

Korekiyo walks away and Kokichi can't help but think that there's something really wrong with him. As much as he would like to annoy Korekiyo, watching Gonta and Ryoma sounds much more entertaining. He pokes his head through the warehouse door curiously and quickly spots Ryoma and Gonta by a box full of rope.

Ah.

"Gonta no understand why Hoshi would want to do such a thing!" Gonta cries as he lifts the box high above his head. "Gonta already said that some of us have plan to destroy Monokuma!"

"And if that plan fails?" Ryoma asks darkly. "What happens then?"

"Um..." Gonta's hands tremor. "Then we all...then we all have to keep facing Monokuma together! Gonta know he can't promise that everything is going to be okay but Gonta *can* promise that he's going to try his very best to keep everyone alive!"

"Aren't you promising just a little too much?" Ryoma asks quietly. He sighs heavily. "Listen kid, just put the box down and walk away. You and everyone else here have bright futures to look forward to whilst I have nothing. There really is no point for me to be alive anymore. At least I can have a meaningful death if it means I get to die keeping you all safe."

"But that's not what Gonta wants!" Gonta yells loudly. The box in his hands starts to splinter. "Gonta...Gonta think *everyone* here deserve to live! Hoshi says that he has no future but that not true! Hoshi will never know what future hold for him if he isn't around to see it so Gonta no let Hoshi do something...something so stupid!"

"Tch..." Ryoma shoves his hands into his pockets. "You really don't understand, do you? In a situation like this we don't have the luxury to decide that we want to live. We need to be making decisions of *who* gets to live now. Thinking that we're all going to get out alive at the moment is overly ambitious and honestly selfish. What this group really needs to focus on is getting past the time limit and you're not going to get someone offering themselves up like me again in the future."

"But that's..." Gonta sniffs as he chokes on a sob. "That's not fair! That's not what Gonta wants at all!"

Ryoma sighs. "Kid, if Monokuma cared about what you want then he wouldn't be forcing you to play a game like this. If I get to die my way then at least no one else here will have to get blood on their hands."

"But...but..." Gonta lowers the box down to his waist, unable to keep his arms up in the air any longer. A loose piece of rope slithers down the side of the wooden box. "Gonta just doesn't understand why we put into game like this a-and Gonta...Gonta rather die then let someone else die for him!"

Ryoma suddenly looks exhausted. "That's how I feel too, kid. That's how I feel too."

"But Gonta refuse to give up just yet!" Gonta grits his teeth, fingers turning red from the pressure of holding the box so tightly. "And if Gonta not give up then Hoshi can't either! Think of all the bugs you haven't seen yet! There so many beautiful things that you'll miss if you're not around to see them!"

"And what if that's what I want?" Ryoma asks softly and *fuck*, did his voice just crack? "The world is just too bright for people like me."

Gonta chokes back on another sob, whimpering as he struggles to figure out what to say next.

Kokichi takes this as his cue to intervene as he pushes the door open completely, making sure that both of them notice him entering the room.

Ryoma throws his head to the side, clearly trying to hide his face. “What do you want?”

“Shinguji said he heard arguing,” Kokichi says. “So I wanted to see what was going on.”

“We not arguing!” Gonta insists tearfully. “We just...Gonta just...”

“Hey, Gonta?” Kokichi cranes his neck up to look him in the eyes. “Tojo said she needed your help with something. Can you go and find her?”

“B-But...” Gonta looks down at the rope sadly. “Gonta needs to be here...”

“It’s okay,” Kokichi says as he plucks the heavy box from Gonta’s hands, stumbling under the weight of it. “There’s no time to do things like hesitate now, you know? I *really* think you should go and see what she wants.”

“...okay, Gonta go,” Gonta says, wiping his eyes with the sleeve of his jacket. “But Gonta just want to say that he’d be really sad if Hoshi died. Gonta...Gonta truly think everyone here is his friend. Gonta not sorry for wanting to keep Hoshi alive but Gonta is sorry that Hoshi not been treat well by life so far. Gonta just hope that...things can get better for Hoshi and for everyone else too.”

Kokichi stares into the box of rope silently as Gonta leaves. He knows he’s left the room when the door closes loudly, the noise ricocheting around the room. Kokichi puts the box of rope back on the shelf it came from.

“Seems like life hates you in particular,” Kokichi says quietly, standing on the tips of his toes to reach the shelf properly. He makes sure that the box is lined up along with the rest.

Ryoma scoffs. “You can say that again.”

“Seems like life hates you in particular.” Kokichi offers Ryoma a defeated smile when the tennis player gives him a dry look. “Sorry but you brought that on yourself.”

“Maybe so,” Ryoma says. His eyelids droop sadly.

Kokichi cringes at the awkward silence, his back turned on the tennis player as he adjusts the box carefully. “Seems like Gonta really doesn’t get it, does he?”

“What do you mean?”

“He just doesn’t get that some people aren’t cut out for living,” Kokichi explains. “Or maybe he does understand and still wants you to live anyway. Doesn’t that kind of make him really selfish?”

Ryoma sighs. “He’s a good kid. Definitely not selfish, just...innocent to how cruel this world can be.”

“...well aren’t you being cruel too?” Kokichi asks. “You probably scarred him for life by offering yourself up so bluntly. People like Gonta don’t hear things like that often, you know?”

“Ouma, what do you want?” Ryoma asks. He tugs on his hat. “Do you want me to apologise to Gonta? Is that it?”

“Nope.” Kokichi turns back around. “I just want you to really think for just a second. You think you’re doing everyone a favour by offering yourself up but if you die then all you’ll be doing is

starting the killing game and once that starts it's not going to stop."

"How do you know?" Ryoma responds. "Maybe you all might get lucky and find an exit once the time limit is over and done with."

Kokichi shakes his head. "That won't happen. It never has and it never will."

"What do you mean that it never has?" Ryoma asks. "Unless this...isn't your first killing game?"

"Oh, it practically is," Kokichi says, waving his hand dismissively. "And maybe I'm just being metaphorical. Or maybe that's also just a lie."

"If you're just going to be annoying then I'm leaving," Ryoma warns him. "Seriously, I'm really not up to listening to nonsense right now."

"I'm just saying..." Kokichi turns his head to the side. "Intentionally or not, you're going to start the game by dying and...I really, really think that in the long run, staying alive is your best option."

"Why?" Ryoma bitterly scoffs. "Kid, you have no idea what-"

"We're in a simulation," Kokichi says with a wince, expecting Monokuma to break down the door to the warehouse and flash a flashback light into his eyes. When nothing happens, he's mildly surprised. "Even if you do die you're just..."

"...unbelievable," Ryoma murmurs. "Out of all of the lies I've heard from people just to keep me alive, this has to be the most-"

"If I wanted to lie to you then I would," Kokichi responds. "But is that what you want to hear? More lies? More false promises that everything is okay? Because I can lie to you right now if that's what you really want." He presses his hands to his face and morphs his face into one of glee. "Guess what, Hoshi-chan? Everything is going to be okay so why don't you turn that frown upside down!"

"*Stop.*" Ryoma glares at him before it wavers. "Stop it, fine, I get your point."

"Good." Kokichi rests his hands behind his head. "Y'know, I'm a leader of hundreds of *thousands* of people. I have no choice but to be cruel sometimes even when it makes me look like the world's biggest asshole."

"Forget it, kid. You don't have to justify yourself, I was being unreasonable anyway," Ryoma says. "Momota and everyone else was right, me offering myself up to die was selfish."

"No, Momota and everyone else is wrong," Kokichi says. "Some people can't see past their own selfish needs and notice the suffering of other people around them. Even though your offer is quite frankly very stupid, the fact that they failed to see why you offered in the first place is concerning."

"Yeah, well..." Ryoma kicks the floor. "I'm used to people never giving me the benefit of the doubt anyway. I'm already a murderer. Just thought that if I gave myself up then at least no one else here would have to know what being one feels like."

Something tight and choking twists in his chest. "You can't save everyone."

"Right back at you, kid," Ryoma says and there's this all knowing look in his eyes. "Listen, I don't know if you told me all of this is a simulation to drive me away from dying but if we are truly trapped in one then how do we-"

“Get out?” Kokichi finishes for him. “If I knew how to leave then I would’ve left hours ago.”

“...tch, you’re one strange kid.”

“Rude!” Kokichi presses a hand to his chest. “I’ll have you know I’m an absolute delight!”

“Whatever helps you sleep at night, kid.”

Kokichi sticks his tongue out of him all the while remembering some phrase he heard one time. What was it again? You have to be cruel to be kind? Thinking about the meaning behind it now leaves a very nasty taste in his mouth that he can’t get rid of.

He bumps into Kirumi and Tenko when there’s only six hours remaining of the time limit.

“Huh? Where’s Monokuma?” Kokichi asks despite the very obvious looks of defeat on both of their faces. “Don’t tell me your half baked plan actually didn’t work?! Who would’ve thought!”

“Shut it!” Tenko glares heatedly at him. “We’ve still got plenty of time to capture him! Monokuma is just very sneaky and Tenko hasn’t seen him at all! As soon as Tenko even catches a glimpse of him then she’s going to kick his furry behind so hard that his legs will fall off!”

“He’s surprisingly evasive,” Kirumi comments. The crease between her brows betray how angry she actually is. “I’m starting to feel rather concerned about finding him in time. I wonder, did he overhear our conversation and is purposefully avoiding us?”

“He’s probably just playing with you all,” Kokichi says. “Because he just sees everything as a game and as far as he’s concerned, he’s winning.”

“He’s not won anything until...” Tenko grimaces. “He’s not allowed to win *any* games because if he does then...”

“Someone will end up dead?” Kokichi asks. “You know you’re not going to die on the spot if you say the dreaded ‘d’ word, you know?”

“You’re heartless, you know that?” Tenko glares at him. “Just because you’re able to pretend that everything is okay doesn’t mean the rest of us can! At least Tenko is trying to help the group! What have you done aside from upset Shirogane and waste your time walking around the school, hmm?”

“Chabashira, that’s enough,” Kirumi sighs.

“She’s right! If you have enough time to yell at me then you have enough time to continue to look for Monokuma!” Kokichi cheers. “So how about you do that before I catch some awful girl disease from the both of you!”

Tenko’s face turns red and Kokichi is certain that if Kirumi wasn’t here then he’d be thrown into a wall. “Is there actually something wrong with you? There must be since you’re joking around at a time like this! Ugh! Tenko wishes you would just disappear!”

“I’m serious, that’s *enough*,” Kirumi once again intervenes. “Ouma, please stop provoking her. Chabashira, I think you should think very carefully about what you just said and then think about the situation we’re in.”

Tenko swallows, wringing her hands together. “Ah...”

“Wow, Chabashira basically told me to go and die!” Kokichi starts to sniffle. “She’s so mean!”

“I’m confident that even you know that you’re pushing her buttons on purpose,” Kirumi says. “So both of you, enough with the childish squabbling. You should both know better.”

“Wow, you’re acting like our mother right now,” Kokichi says.

Kirumi rolls her eyes. “Please don’t call me your mother.”

Tenko uncharacteristically watches them quietly. “Tojo, Tenko thinks that we should get going now.”

“Ah, that’s right. You both still need to waste even more time finding Monokuma!” Kokichi says. “Welp, good luck with that!”

He waves them off and isn’t all that surprised when they both ignore him. There’s a brief moment of calm before he senses someone behind him. He lazily turns his head around and spots Monokuma hiding behind a corner.

“Ooh, girls can be really scary sometimes,” Monokuma says. “Look at me! I’m trembling so hard that my wires are going to come undone!”

“Wow, that would be really useful actually!” Kokichi comments.

“You’re very mean, you know that?” Monokuma says with a sniff. “You’re going to make me cry. Is that what you want? You want your poor old headteacher to cry?”

“Are you even capable of crying?”

“I can squeeze a couple of crocodile tears out for a camera,” Monokuma says. “But bear tears are off the table.”

Kokichi rolls his eyes. “Lame.”

“Lame? What’s lame is that there’s no dead body yet!” Monokuma complains. “And it’s already been six hours! What’s a bear gotta do around here for a corpse? Throw a party?”

“Maybe if you ask everyone really nicely then they might decide to all die just for you,” Kokichi suggests.

“Ah, as wonderful as that sounds, I’d rather have everyone die one at a time so I can have *some* class trials,” Monokuma says. “They’re educational as well as fun, you know? You learn a lot of life lessons from them, which is a shame because the life expectancy of a student who plays my game is usually cut down drastically.”

“Wow! I’m utterly enthralled by this conversation!” Kokichi says. “Not!”

“When you say things like that it makes me all the more excited to kill you,” Monokuma responds, showing off his claws. “And believe me when I say I’m going to enjoy every second of punishing you.”

“Wow, sounds kinky. Can’t wait!”

“Why you...” Monokuma pouts. “It’s not fun when you’re not scared! I mean, the banter is great

and it's nice to talk to someone who isn't just a Junko Enoshima wannabe but ugh, can you pretend to be just a little scared?"

"Haven't you noticed? I'm shaking in my boots right now!"

"You're not wearing any boots."

"Excellent observation!" Kokichi smiles cheekily. "So, do you wanna tell me why you decided to start the game so suddenly? I thought you wanted everything to be perfect and things clearly are the exact opposite! How am I supposed to enjoy the game now knowing that I'm not going to get the full experience?"

"I know, I know, it pains me too," Monokuma says with a snuffle, wiping a pretend tear from his eye. "But all the waiting around got so *boring* and just the thought of seeing everyone's faces when they realise they're going to have to kill each other worked me up so much that-"

"Ew, never mind. I'm sorry I asked," Kokichi mutters.

"I just realised that I can either have a half decent game or *no* game at all so obviously I went with the more appealing choice," Monokuma explains. "As upsetting as it is to have a couple of students miss out on such a once in a lifetime experience..." Monokuma's smile stretches. "Or is it a twice in a lifetime experience?"

"How should I know?" Kokichi asks before frowning. There's a gut churning look in Monokuma's eyes that suggests he knows something that he doesn't. "...hmm? What's got you grinning away?"

"Well I ended up realising something after finding Akamatsu's hairpin and Amami's ring," Monokuma says. "What was the message they left? Only way leave...survive. Or did they mean to say that the only way to leave is to survive?"

Everything clicks together at once. It's like all of his thoughts and ideas and theories have finally pushed and pressed and mixed and twisted into each other to create something that actually makes sense. Fuck, how could he have been so dense? Of course the message had a double sided meaning.

Kaede Akamatsu and Rantaro Amami are not here because they *survived*. Shuichi Saihara, Maki Harukawa and Himiko Yumeno must've survived a previous killing game too, which is why they were never even on the second whiteboard in the first place.

"I'm well aware that the simulation has some sort of glitch," Monokuma says. "It just took me a while to figure out what that glitch *was*. I'm aware that we've all been here before, that a game has taken place and we don't remember. That's because once a game takes place everyone is supposed to wake up after it's done. Just imagine how surprised I was when I woke up and realised a couple of my students were missing. It was absolutely despairing!"

Kokichi grinds his teeth together quietly. "And?"

"Well isn't it obvious?" Monokuma cackles. "There's only one way out of here and that's to survive! The only thing between everyone escaping out of here alive is my killing game and the precious rules that come along with it!"

He wants to punch him. "If you figured out all of this without my help then why-"

"Cleaning your room seemed too much of a hassle," Monokuma says with a lazy shrug. "And you were going to break into it sooner or later and put two and two together. I just sped up the process."

“That still doesn’t explain why you didn’t just reset me along with everyone else,” Kokichi argues. “What the hell do you actually want from me?”

“Nothing really,” Monokuma admits. “I just had this nagging feeling in the back of my head that I should knock you down a few pegs for whatever reason. Sheesh, you must’ve really ticked me off during one of the previous killing games, kid.”

So he’s suffering the consequences of his actions from a killing game he doesn’t even remember? The thought alone makes him want to laugh in frustration. He’s witnessed first hand some of the others react strongly to certain objects or remember something out of the blue. It’s just his luck that Monokuma took one look at him and his room and decided to embarrass him just because he remembered something that isn’t even relevant now.

“Aw, are you giving me the silent treatment?” Monokuma coos. “I only make you despair because I care. Wow, maybe I should turn that into my catchphrase or something! It’s just rolls off the tongue-”

“Shut up.”

“Ouch, someone is taking this very personally,” Monokuma giggles. “Well, I can completely reassure you that it’s nothing personal but I think even you know what I’m going to say next. Our little alliance? It’s over now. Well, was it truly an alliance to begin with?”

“You do realise how much I know, right?” Kokichi’s face twists into something much darker. “What the hell is stopping me from telling everyone the truth right now?”

“Because,” Monokuma says. “Who is going to believe you?”

His words hit like a punch to the gut. “They’ll believe me over you any day.”

“Oh? Are you going to tell them that you willingly teamed up with me to give yourself an advantage?” Monokuma asks with a smug smile. “Or are you going to tell them that there’s a secret room they haven’t had the chance to see yet? Better yet, are you going to tell them that you lied about the fact you knew about the killing game happening? I bet everyone really would’ve appreciated a heads up, you know?”

“Like I said, they’ll believe me over you any day,” Kokichi says stiffly. “Everything you just said can easily be explained away.”

“So now that we’re on different teams again you’re just going to act like you did nothing wrong?” Monokuma laughs. “That’s interesting.”

“Well we’ve clearly come to a standstill,” Kokichi says. “Did you forget that I know about Shirogane being your partner in crime?”

“I prefer the term mastermind,” Monokuma responds. “And do you really think anyone is going to believe you if you tell them? Everyone has figured out by now that you love to tell lies and why would anyone believe that a shy and innocent looking girl like Shirogane is the mastermind anyway?”

“We both know that she’s not shy or innocent-”

“Of course *we* both know that,” Monokuma says. “But, well, if people had to pick between someone like Shirogane or the awkward kid who has made it obvious that he thinks everyone is stupid and has been acting way too calm about the time limit, well, who do you think people would

believe is the mastermind out of them both?"

...he's got him hook, line and sinker. He'd applaud Monokuma for the sheer nerve of setting him up like this but he's come to the frightful realisation that if he gets along closer to the bear then he's actually going to hit him. Hard. He lets out a strangled laugh instead.

"Oh, you really *are* evil, aren't you?" Kokichi says. "I was wondering when you were finally going to show your true colours."

"I was showing them all along," Monokuma says. "You were just so wrapped up in your paranoid attempt to know more than everyone else that you didn't realise."

"...tch, rot in hell."

"Now that's not very nice," Monokuma chides him before smiling. "As fun as this breakup was, I have a lot of preparation to do. After all, it looks like I'm going to have to punish eleven students very soon!"

The bear waddles away and Kokichi can easily vision himself throttling Monokuma from behind. Unfortunately, all he can do is dream. It doesn't stop his fingers twitching sporadically by his sides.

—

Kokichi ends up in his bedroom when he realises that there's only a little over an hour left of the time limit remaining. He locks his door up tight and chews viciously on the end of a whiteboard pen, miraculously managing to not spill ink down the front of himself.

The time limit is dangerously approaching and thankfully no one is dead. *Yet*. There's this horrible nagging feeling in the back of his mind that the inevitable is going to happen and soon he's going to be looking down at the corpse of one of his classmates. He wonders how he's going to react? He wonders who the unlucky bastard is going to be.

It doesn't matter how many times he scrawls out different ideas. There's nowhere to run to safety because Monokuma is always fucking watching. They can't fight back because there's hardly any decent weapons. Gonta might be able to fight back but Kokichi doubts Monokuma himself is going to kill everyone with his own paws. No, he must have something else planned to get rid of them all.

If everyone locks themselves in their rooms then they might be able to buy themselves a couple of minutes of extra time but what's the point in that? What's the point in prolonging the suffering, giving yourself an additional extra moments of life to torment yourself knowing that death is right around the corner and there's not a single thing you can do about it?

He can imagine that some students will go down fighting, that people like Kaito and Gonta and Tenko will probably fight Monokuma tooth and nail until every last breath is sucked from their lungs. Perhaps people like Angie and Korekiyo will just close their eyes and embrace death with open arms, after all Angie has a God that will greet her and Korekiyo will probably find some way to document the process of death in his own strange way. Will Kirumi try and keep everyone safe, even at the cost of her own life? Will Ryoma be relieved that he can finally rest? How much will Miu beg for her life even when she knows it'll be pointless? Will Kiibo even feel the pain of dying?

What sort of smile will be on Tsumugi's face as she watches everyone around her expire?

Kokichi sits on the end of his bed with a frown, pulling the pen from his mouth with a huff. There must be something, some sort of loophole that will force the game to stop. However, even after frantically scrolling through the rules several times he frustratingly realised that Monokuma only had one rule to follow himself and that was that he wasn't allowed to murder a student.

Well, isn't that ironic? If someone doesn't die soon then he'll be going against the very rule he put in place...

...huh, that must mean all the rules must be void once the time limit is over. Kokichi sighs. It's just a shame that there's not any rules he could exploit because of that. The very tragic and blunt and annoying truth is that everyone here is well and truly fucked unless something *extremely* bad happens.

It is sort of admirable though that no one actually has turned to murder yet. Miu did cry thinking about it but thankfully Kiibo must've put her off the idea or at the very least she scared herself out of it. Korekiyo mentioned that Kokichi himself wasn't a good enough victim for him, which was super weird. Hopefully *no one* here meets Korekiyo's strange standards.

He briefly wonders where Ryoma is. Did the tennis player retreat to his room after being talked down by both Gonta and himself? There's been no body discovery announcement so he must be okay for now.

There's a knock at his door and he rolls his eyes, resting his chin in his hand as he looks over at it. It's probably Kaito or Kirumi coming to get him to join in on the fruitless search for Monokuma. His foot taps against the floor as whoever is behind his door knocks again, this time a lot louder and a lot more firmer.

With a heavy sigh he checks through the peephole to see who it is. When he sees Tsumugi waiting outside he sighs even louder and walks away. Like *hell* he's spending his last hour alive dealing with her bullshit. He just needs to think, to try and figure something out at least.

The door handle rattles and he takes another step back, raising an eyebrow. Seriously, what does she actually want? She is aware that Monokuma broke off their stupid little alliance, right? He narrows his eyes and scrambles to pick something up to...to defend himself just in case. He ends up grabbing his desk chair. It's certainly light enough to throw if needed.

"Ouma? Ouma, I know you're in there!" Tsumugi calls through the door. "I need to have a word with you!"

Hah. Fat chance. He's appreciative of the door acting as a barrier between himself and a homicidal girl who has basically replaced air with despair. He readjusts his grip on the chair just in case she somehow does manage to break his door down. His grip almost slips however when the worst sound he's ever heard assaults his ears loudly. It's a struggle between deciding to keep a hold of the chair or covering his ears with his hands.

The handle stops rattling momentarily and he thinks that maybe Tsumugi might've got spooked by the sickly song that's playing loud enough to make even his *bones* shake. He swallows, eyes darting to the handle when it starts shaking again.

He's starting to realise that maybe locking himself in his room where there's zero ways of escape aside from the door was perhaps not the smartest idea. He's also finding it rather concerning that he can hear his heart beating manically over the sound of the music. Hmm, that's probably not healthy but he's decided he's going to blame it on the adrenaline. He swallows and creeps over to the door once more, chair in hand.

Either he can wait her out or push past her and both options aren't the most appealing, especially since there's this primal urge to fucking run as fast as he can until he finds someone else that isn't actually insane. He'd take absolutely *anyone* over Tsumugi at the moment.

What if she's come here to finish him off? To tidy up all the loose ends? Monokuma has no need for him and he knows so fucking much. No, no, that can't be right. If she kills him then that means she'll have to also survive a class trial and that just doesn't sit right with him. Tsumugi is obsessed with despair, she probably wants a long and successful game. Which is why it's so confusing why she's here banging at his door one hour before the time limit runs out.

Doesn't she have literally *anything* else better to do? Wouldn't she rather watch everyone run around like headless chickens as they realise that they're practically standing on death's doorstep? *What does she want from him?*

He lifts the chair up, ready to swing it when the door suddenly creaks open. Tsumugi stands with a key in her hand and a very pissed off scowl on her face. Ugh, of course she has a key for everyone's room.

She slams the door closed behind herself before storming into the room, jabbing a finger towards him.

"Why'd you have to let Angie see my room!" Tsumugi yells over the music. "Now there's people crawling all over the girl's bathroom!"

He assesses the situation. If he manages to hit her hard enough then he could probably knock her to the floor and buy himself enough time to run. If everyone is at the girl's bathroom then he just needs to run there and glue himself to someone else for a while or at least long enough for Tsumugi to stop breathing down his neck.

She looks at the chair in his hands and laughs at him. "Are you using a chair to defend yourself?"

"Is it any of your business?" Kokichi fires back, tightening his grip.

"Wow, you really are scared, huh?" Tsumugi taunts him, putting a finger to her cheek. "What, are you worried about the time limit running out?"

"Shouldn't you be worried too?"

"Um, did you hear Monokuma properly?" Tsumugi rolls her eyes. "Only students forced into the killing game are going to be killed so..."

Kokichi glares at her. "Of course he'd bend the rules enough to protect you."

"It's the perks of being the mastermind," Tsumugi admits. "But I do have to admit, I'd rather not have everyone die in such a boring way. It's much more fun watching everyone turn on each other one by one."

"Surely you and Monokuma should've realised that people aren't stupid enough to start killing each other because you want them to," Kokichi snaps. "A boring end to your game is what you deserve, you know?"

"Oh? So you're happy to let Monokuma tear you to shreds then?" Tsumugi asks.

No. "If it means you don't get the satisfaction of having a successful killing game then yes."

“Hmm, is that so?” Tsumugi smiles. “But that’s Ouma’s lie, isn’t it? You don’t want to die and you’re certainly not foolish enough to die for such a petty reason.”

“Or is that just what Shirogane thinks?” Kokichi asks, pretending that she hasn’t just hit the nail on the head.

“Well, I’ll just have to wait and see won’t I?” Tsumugi answers. “Or maybe waiting is the wrong idea. After all, if I wait too long then the time limit will come to an end and there will be no bodies for Monokuma.”

“...what do you mean by that?”

“Well Monokuma has informed me that absolutely no one has taken the initiative to kill someone yet,” Tsumugi says. “And I think even he’s getting a little nervous, you know? Killing everyone so early on in a game is just so, ugh, it’s just so *boring* and it’s such a *waste*. We’ve spent *so* much time preparing for a super fun game and I’d rather not have our efforts amount to nothing, you know?”

“Then how about you die, hmm? It’ll save the rest of us a lot of hassle,” Kokichi fires back.

“I can’t die! I have a game to observe!” Tsumugi says, acting like he’s just said the stupidest thing in the world. “But I can’t have a game if no one dies and I truly thought that someone would’ve kicked the bucket by now.”

“That’s not my problem,” Kokichi says. “Honestly if you’ve just come here to complain then leave. If you’ve come here to beg for me to kill someone myself then you’re asking the wrong-”

“Oh, I’m well aware that you’ll never get your hands dirty,” Tsumugi responds. “That’s just not the sort of person you are, is it? But you’re currently the only person I know of who is alone at the moment and, well, it’s such a shame that I’m so tragically plain and no one noticed me slip away from the group for a couple of moments...”

Run. “I’m sure Tojo will be doing a headcount now as we speak.”

“She’s with Chabashira still,” Tsumugi says, taking a step forward. “And Momota is with them trying to open the wall in the girl’s bathroom. Hoshi is with Shinguji in the dining hall and I just saw Iruma and Kiibo head into her lab together. I’m not entirely sure where Angie or Gonta are but I’m sure they’re busy doing their own things.”

She smiles.

“So it’s only us here and the music is playing very loud.”

“If you kill me then you’ll have to survive a class trial, you know?” Kokichi argues back. “And if you do end up surviving it then everyone will die anyway-”

“Think back to what you said before,” Tsumugi says. “About the rules.”

His eyes darken. “You’re not fucking serious, are you?”

“If I kill you right now then the only people who will know your true killer is you, me and Monokuma,” Tsumugi says excitedly. “No one else will have to know if, let’s say, Monokuma turns a blind eye for a second and has to pick someone else to be the culprit instead.”

“That’s...” That’s cheating. *That’s cheating.* He chokes on a rage fuelled laugh. “You really are

the lowest of the low. Your game isn't going the way you want it to so you cheat like a sore loser, no, like a *child* and bend the rules until there's no other option for you to win. You're *pathetic*."

Tsumugi's face twists until she's wearing a monstrous smile. "And you're scared."

He doesn't recall swinging the chair at her head until she crumples to the floor, pressing a hand to her hair. Her fingertips are covered in pink and she looks dazed for a moment, as if she wasn't expecting to be attacked. Something yells at him from the back of his mind, screaming at him that he *really* shouldn't have done that but it's too late to ponder over the consequences of his actions.

Kokichi runs, swinging his bedroom door open with sweaty palms and looking around frantically. He catches Tsumugi pull herself up from the floor from the corner of his eye and he thinks fuck it, he needs to leave and he needs to leave *now*. He leaps over the railings, only realising after he's let go of the railing how high his bedroom floor is from the ground floor. His ankles scream at him in protest as he lands, even as he crouches to the floor to better protect them.

When he looks up he sees Tsumugi leaning over the railings, her eyes practically glowing with the animalistic instinct to get him. It's almost as if she's the predator and he's the prey. The feeling of her eyes watching his every movement leaves him feeling justifiably more than freaked out. He dashes to the door just as Tsumugi starts to thunder down the stairs, hands slipping on the metal handle.

He twists the handle open at the same time as Tsumugi is behind him, yanking the door open just as she pulls on his free arm, pulling him back into the dormitory. The door clatters against the glass wall, wobbling so violently that it's a miracle that it doesn't smash into millions of pieces. They both end up on the floor but he's already pulling himself back up to go outside again.

The music booming through the speakers of each monitor doesn't help the situation at all. It smothers every other sound that is made, swallowing up Tsumugi's manic giggles as she goes to grab him again and his exhausted panting.

She grabs his ankle and pulls *hard*, causing him to crash down onto his stomach. He kicks back furiously in response, hitting her fingers over and over again in retaliation. It turns out she's absolutely fucking relentless because even after several kicks her grip is frightfully strong.

He starts to drag himself backwards instead with his hands, pulling her along with him. Even though she's crawling up his leg if he can just make it outside then...well, he doesn't have a plan but if she manages to close the dormitory door then he'll be trapped again and that really, really, *really* won't do at all.

His finger brushes against the stone entrance outside and he turns his eyes away from Tsumugi for just a second to see how far away he is, to see just how much further he has until he can call out for help.

He turns back around and barely manages to duck his head to the side when Tsumugi swings down a knife that she must've kept hidden in her pocket. Fuck, he was stupid to think that she would try and kill him with just her bare hands. She lifts the knife up again before it can hit the floor and straddles his legs, which he continues to furiously kick.

"Keep...keep still!" Tsumugi screams over the music, a trickle of blood running down the side of her head. "*Stop trying to get in the way of me and my killing game!*"

Kokichi catches her wrists as she swings down once more, wondering how he managed to fuck up so badly to be in this situation in the first place. He wheezes as they both push against each other,

Tsumugi laughing at him as she presses the knife down further and further as he desperately keeps the blade from getting too close. Her lithe figure betrays just how strong she is but Kokichi also wonders if her strength is being fuelled by her crazed desperation for her killing game to start.

He grits his teeth and turns his head to the side, feeling droplets of sweat trickle down his cheek as his hands start to tremble. If his grip on Tsumugi's wrists weren't the only thing between him and immediate death then he would've let go to let his hands rest by now. Alas, if he stops pushing now then he'll die and he doesn't plan on dying any time soon. He wants to live, damn it.

He. Wants. To. Live.

A shadow casts over him and he looks up to meet a pair of blue eyes looking down at him in surprise. It distracts him for a second too long. He feels the pain before he sees the knife push into his side, his wriggling causing Tsumugi to miss her mark of stabbing him somewhere worse. That doesn't stop the pain from turning from zero to one hundred in under a second and his side turns into white hot agony. His uniform quickly goes from white to pink.

Tsumugi seems pleased with herself and lifts the knife up again, only realising at the last second that she now has an audience. Her smile slips away as she sees Angie standing in the entrance, eyes wide and a hand covering her mouth.

"Oh." Tsumugi sighs loudly before she looks down at Kokichi with an annoyed expression. He stares back at her silently, his instincts screaming at him to keep still, telling him if he makes any sudden move then she's going to finish the job.

Angie stumbles back, eyes moving up and down from Tsumugi, who is pulling herself up from the floor and Kokichi, who lies on the floor with his hands held up against the floor in surrender.

"...run," Kokichi croaks out, throwing all reason out of the window. If Angie runs then, then, then she'll be able to tell someone what she saw, that she saw Tsumugi hurt him. "Are you deaf? Run!"

Angie jolts as if she's been shocked and bolts. He tries to grab Tsumugi as she chases after her but she cruelly presses her hand into his wound and he screams because the pain is *too much*. There's bile pooling at the back of his throat and he rolls onto his side, coughing as Tsumugi darts from the dormitory. He hacks and splutters as he tries to drag himself up off the floor, one hand pressing desperately onto his side and the other smearing blood along the glass walls as he uses them as a crutch to stand up.

He realises his legs are shaking as if he was a new born foal. All he can hear is his own breathing, despite the nauseating music that's still playing loud enough to give the walls a pulse. He nearly slips, gasping as the pain attacks him viciously. Breathing through his nose he barely manages to stand up straight before Tsumugi returns, dragging Angie along by the arm.

Somehow Tsumugi herself is clean, managing to keep even a splatter of blood from touching her clothes. However, the limp...the limp *body* she's dragging along is a completely other story.

The only reason he realises that the music has finally stopped is because he hears Tsumugi tut in disappointment, dropping Angie's hand to the floor. "I could've sworn she was in the school..."

Her unsympathetic look of boredom is more than startling. It's downright *frightening*. Kokichi takes a tiny step back, cradling his wound helplessly as Tsumugi fiddles with the knife in her hand. Their eyes meet and she makes a beeline straight over to him. He winces, unsure if he's able to even fight back against another attack when to his surprise all that she does is grab his shirt and use it to clean the knife.

“What a pain...” Tsumugi murmurs as she lets the knife clatter on the floor. “This isn’t what I planned at all!”

He wants to berate her, ask her why the hell she just killed Angie and is showing more remorse over the fact that she didn’t get to kill her intended target. However, his tongue becomes heavy and he’s forced to turn to the wall for support again. He’s pretty sure it’s pure spite that’s keeping him standing at this point.

Tsumugi runs her hands through her hair in distress. “I can make this work...yeah, I can still make this work.”

“Will you shut up for once in your life?” Kokichi hisses as he presses a little too hard against his side.

“No, *you* shut up!” Tsumugi snaps. “Why couldn’t you have just let me kill you?! Then I wouldn’t be in this mess!”

Kokichi snorts sarcastically. “Y-Yeah, sure, blame all this on me.”

“Maybe I will...” Tsumugi trails off before something catches her eye. “No...wait a second. Change of plan, I’ve figured out who the culprit can be!”

Tsumugi tries to hide her wild smile behind her fingers, shaking with excitement as she looks outside of the glass with a pleased look in her eyes. Kokichi turns his head slowly to see what the hell she’s actually looking at when his stomach drops. No, *nononono*. She isn’t planning on pinning all of this on him, is she?

She wraps her arms around his shoulders, resting her chin on his shoulder as she shakily breathes into his ear. “The amount of despair everyone will feel if they believe that *he*’s the culprit will be unmatched!” Her eyes swirl. “Everyone will be horrified if they believe a *sweetheart* like him did something like this!”

Kokichi feels like he’s paralyzed as Gonta runs towards the dormitory with a horrified look. He must’ve spotted all of the blood Kokichi smeared over the glass walls. “Huh? What...Gonta doesn’t...”

Gonta steps into the dormitory helplessly, peering around like a lost child as he sees Angie lying on the floor and Tsumugi clutching Kokichi to her chest possessively. His mouth opens and closes.

“What...what *happen*?”

“*If I can’t win this game, then I’ll make it boring for everyone!*”

Gonta looks at them both, turning pale. “O-Ouma...Shirogane...What happened to Angie?”

“*That’s my revenge.*”

Tsumugi tilts her head down, burying her face into Kokichi’s shoulder, crouching behind him as if she was nothing more than a feeble kid. He can hear her barely suppressing her laughter as she squeezes his arms, nails pinching his skin. Outside of the glass walls, he sees everyone leave the school in confusion before spotting the bloody walls of the dormitory. As everyone runs over, Tsumugi lets out one last laugh before she lifts her head up and-

“*Well then...the culprit is Gonta.*”

-screams.

Before he can react she pulls him to the floor, pretending to hold him close as she cowers, scooting them both backwards until her back hits the wall. He can hear the body discovery announcement play as Kaito and Kirumi burst into the room, Kaito staring at Tsumugi whilst Kirumi notices the body.

“A body has been discovered!” Monokuma announces cheerfully from a monitor. “I’d tell you all to gather at the dormitory but it seems you’re all there already!”

When the monitor clicks off, Tsumugi’s breathing picks up frantically as she jabs a finger at Gonta, tears streaming down her face. “G-Get him away from us!”

“Huh?!” Gonta raises his hands in alarm. “W-What?!”

“What the hell is going on?!” Kaito asks, pushing his way forward. “What happened-”

“Gonta *attacked* us!” Tsumugi cries, almost choking on her next sob. “G-Gonta attacked us and killed...*he killed Angie!*”

“Gonta did not!” Gonta looks mortified at the accusation. “G-Gonta only got here minute ago and see Angie on floor a-and Shirogane and Ouma together!”

“He’s lying!” Tsumugi insists tearfully. She presses a hand to her head, drawing attention to the line of blood that’s running down her face. “H-He hurt me and he hurt Ouma too! L-Look, he’s been stabbed!”

She roughly turns him on his side and shows the group his bloody stab wound that’s only getting worse by the second. He groans and slams his hand back over it in a futile attempt to stop any more blood from seeping from his body. The attempt is clumsy at best and he watches tiredly as pink trickles between his fingers.

“That needs to be seen to immediately,” Kirumi says. She puts a hand to her chin before her eyes widen in realisation. “I remember seeing some first aid kits in the warehouse. P-Please just wait a second whilst I retrieve them.”

She dashes off, holding her skirts as she practically sprints to the academy.

“Is what you’re saying true?” Korekiyo asks, sounding a little too amused. “Even I’m struggling to imagine that someone like Gonta would do something like this.”

“That because Gonta *didn’t!*” Gonta cries. “Gonta not know why he being blamed but Gonta already said he would never hurt anyone! Gonta...Gonta promised that he would help friends, not kill them!”

Kokichi groans as he tries to sit up, whining when Tsumugi subtly presses a finger down into his side. If she’s trying to silence him by aggravating his wound then she’s doing a *fantastic* job because the pain makes his entire body jolt.

“If Gonta says he didn’t do it then he didn’t do it!” Kaito argues for him. “Just look at him! I refuse to believe that someone like him would lie!”

Gonta snuffles. “Gonta...Gonta truly not know what happened.”

“Gonta, *argue back already!*”

“But why would Shirogane lie about something like this?” Tenko asks nervously. “Tenko also refuses to believe that someone like her would make up something so horrible!”

Tsumugi’s bottom lip wobbles as she hides her face behind her hair. “I’m...telling the truth. J-Just look at the injuries both Ouma and I have. W-We were...we were only trying to protect Angie!”

“That not true!” Gonta argues. “That not true at all!”

“Can you prove why?” Korekiyo asks.

“Huh?” Gonta blinks.

“Just make an excuse or...whatever!”

“...lying...” Kokichi chokes out.

“Who’s lying?” Ryoma asks, thankfully picking up on Kokichi’s very quiet murmur.

He tries to roll his eyes over to Tsumugi, tries to say her name but she presses down on his side hard and he gasps just as her hands fly to her mouth. “I-I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean to catch your side!”

He gives her a withered look. “O-Of course you didn’t.”

Kirumi runs back in alongside Monokuma, who glances around the room with a low whistle. “Wow, talk about a messy kill.”

“Please do be quiet,” Kiibo snaps.

“I-Is that it now though?” Miu asks suddenly. “Is that...s-stupid time limit over and done with now?”

“Well I see a dead body so...” Monokuma smiles. “Yep!”

“What a waste,” Ryoma mutters darkly, looking more furious at himself than anything else. “This isn’t right.”

“That’s why it’s up to all of you to avenge her!” Monokuma cheers. “And the only way you can all do that is partaking in a class trial!”

“Seriously?” Tenko grits her teeth. “Is that all you care about right now?”

“I care about punishing the killer!” Monokuma says.

“Well we have two options so it seems,” Korekiyo states bluntly. “Shirogane claims Gonta is the killer but it’s likely she could be lying too.”

“H-How could you say such a thing?!” Tsumugi cries. “Why would I lie?!”

“Ouma said that someone was lying,” Kiibo says. “But I couldn’t pick up who he said was.”

“How about we save it for the class trial, hmm?” Monokuma suggests. “If you’ve already whittled it down to two suspects then how about we skip the investigation altogether? Unless you all want to waste even more time.”

“Well obviously Angie was stabbed by...” Kaito looks around the room. “That knife over there.

It's just I can't believe that someone here would do such a thing!"

"Well you better believe it, spaceman," Monokuma says. "Because I saw with my very own eyes who killed Angie! Now all you have to do is figure out who the culprit is and bring them to justice!"

"Please, let me tend to Ouma's wound first," Kirumi says as she kneels on the floor, ignoring the blood that seeps into her skirts. She knocks his hand away with a heavy wince. "Monokuma, none of the first aid kits had any needles or thread in them. Do you know where I could find some?"

"In the warehouse," Monokuma answers. "After the trial, of course."

"But..." Kirumi stares at the bear with a pained expression. "Ouma's been *stabbed*. A wound as severe as this shouldn't be ignored for too long."

"You can just patch it up, right? Make sure he can make it through the trial at least?" Monokuma points out. "After all, if you vote for the wrong person then you're all going to die anyway."

"W-We won't vote wrong, right?" Miu trembles. "A-Anyway, isn't it fucking obvious who the killer is? O-Only someone as big as Gonta could've hurt so many people in a short amount of time."

"It wasn't Gonta! Gonta swear!"

"You promise us that you didn't do it but you're not very good at explaining why you're not the killer," Korekiyo says. "If you continue to argue like that during the trial then I'll have no choice but to vote for you."

"But...Gonta innocent," Gonta chokes out. "Gonta *promise!*"

Kokichi winces as Kirumi carefully wraps his stomach and side. The maid sighs bitterly when blood soaks through the bandages almost instantaneously. "I promise you that as soon as the trial is finished then I will tend to your wound properly. However, it is my deepest regret to say that this is all I can do for you for now."

"It's...it's fine," Kokichi says. "Something...something tells me this trial isn't going to last long anyway."

"That's right," Kiibo agrees. "With you as a witness all you have to do is say what happened and then we can vote for the culprit, correct?"

"Of course! It's as simple as that!" Monokuma says.

"The rules say that the culprit will be punished though," Tenko says. "What do you mean by that?"

"Have you ever heard of the phrase 'an eye for an eye?'" Monokuma asks with a giggle.

Korekiyo hums. "So you're going to kill the culprit?"

"T-That's horrible!" Tenko snarls. "That's not right!"

"It's how the world works sometimes," Ryoma sighs.

Kaito glares at Monokuma. "So does that mean if we vote wrong then we'll be all killed instead? How the hell is that fair?!"

“I just like to make sure that each of my trials are fair for both the culprit and everyone else,” Monokuma says. “So isn’t it only fair if they both have to share the same punishments depending on which way the trial goes?”

“No?” Kiibo rolls his eyes. “That’s not how it works at court at all!”

“Well sorry to burst your bubble but I do things a little differently around here!” Monokuma declares. “So if you’re all done whining I think we should start the class trial!”

“But...but Gonta no think he can argue right,” Gonta frets. “Everyone already suspicious of Gonta but he no have proof that he didn’t do it! Gonta can’t let everyone vote wrong and die so...so Gonta really...really not know what to do.”

“Don’t worry, if you say you’re innocent then I’ll argue for you,” Kaito promises firmly, slapping a hand down onto Gonta’s shoulder. “I believe in you!”

Kokichi almost throws up as Kirumi helps him up from the floor, wrapping his arm around her shoulder. The room blurs together as he walks, his vision already woozy from the drastic blood loss. The only clear thing he can see is the shine coming from Tsumugi’s glasses as she stares at him expectantly, her eyes burning holes into his back throughout the entire walk to the trial grounds.

—

It’s a screaming match from the very second Monokuma allows them to argue.

“I promise that I’m telling the truth!” Tsumugi pleads as she clasps her hands to her chest. “I went for a walk and saw Ouma and Angie arguing with Gonta! He had a knife in his hand and was threatening them both! By the time I reached them he had already stabbed Ouma and was in the middle of killing Angie. When he spotted me he pushed me out of the way and I hit my head!”

“That not true!” Gonta argues. “Gonta leave school just little bit after Angie. Gonta saw her leave after eating in dining room! He wanted to check on her but wanted to check school one more time for Monokuma! When Gonta couldn’t find him he left and that’s when Gonta saw blood all over the walls and went to see what happened!”

“That’s not true!” Tsumugi cries. “It’s really not!”

“B-But it *is*!” Gonta insists. “Gonta truly not know who killer is because when he walked in Angie already dead and Ouma had wound! Gonta know Shirogane has cut on head but it doesn’t match other wounds!”

“So do you think Shirogane is the killer?” Korekiyo asks. “And that her wound was caused by either Ouma or Angie fighting back?”

“Gonta doesn’t know because...he doesn’t want any of his friends to be killer!” Gonta sobs. “Gonta just saying what he saw! Honest!”

Tsumugi breaks down into a fresh set of tears. “I-I don’t want anyone here to be a killer too b-but I’m just saying what I saw! I-I really do promise that even though my wound is less severe, it was caused because of Gonta!”

“Ouma, isn’t it about time you tell us what happened?” Kiibo asks. “You’re the only one who truly saw what happened, right? If you can confirm which one of them is lying then we can safely vote for the right person.”

Kokichi pretends he's not swaying at his podium, hand still on his side as he lifts his head up. "Huh? Did someone say something?"

"Are we sure we can rely on him?" Tenko asks anxiously. "Tenko knows he saw everything but... just look at him. He looks like he's barely even awake."

"I'm awake. Promise," Kokichi says. Turning to face her makes the room turn into a kaleidoscope of different colours. He licks his lips. "What...was it you wanted me to say again?"

"We want you to tell us which one of them is telling the truth," Kirumi says. "You saw what happened, correct?"

"I did?" Kokichi blinks. Ah, that's right. He did. He was there for everything. He was there when Tsumugi stabbed him and hunted down Angie like an animal and killed her too. He was there when Gonta walked in and looked at them all in horror. He was there when Tsumugi cruelly decided that Gonta would pay for her sins. "Ah..."

"Just fucking spit it out already!" Miu snaps. "Quit it with the fucking dramatics!"

"The kid has genuinely lost a lot of blood, leave him be," Ryoma says, narrowing his eyes. "It's not like we have a time limit for this trial."

"But there is a time limit for my patience!" Monokuma chirps.

"Ouma, please just tell everyone what happened!" Tsumugi pleads. "This is just getting too cruel now!"

"I don't want to survive if it means I have to stoop to your level."

"Oh, that's a low blow right there..."

Why is he remembering snippets of conversation from a discussion he doesn't recall having? It's like he's watching himself through a blurry screen, arguing with people in this very room but under different circumstances. All he can hear is muffled back and forth yelling. He thinks someone is crying. Is Gonta crying again?

He leans on his podium for support, burying his face into his arms. "I was...stabbed."

"We got that dipshit," Miu says, rolling her eyes. "By who, moron?!"

"...um..."

"Because..." He pictures Monokuma sneering down at him. "Who is going to believe you anyway?"

He feels sweat pooling along his forehead and he's not sure whether it's the wound or the unexplainable feeling of guilt catching up with him. His stab wound throbs and the smell of iron grows a little too strong. He buries his nose into his sleeve to try and evade the smell.

Tsumugi is practically backed up into a corner and here he is letting his chance to get rid of her slip away. All he has to do is open up his stupid mouth and tell them what happened, tell them that Angie was at the wrong place at the wrong time and that Tsumugi killed her out of malice and not because she wanted to be noble and save everyone. He's not even sure why they're buying her story in the first place. She really is lucky that she manages to pull off the innocent girl look.

He licks his lips again, finding that they keep turning dry. "It was..."

"Everyone, please forgive him. Gonta tried to save us all from despair by taking on the sin of killing us."

...that's right, during one of the previous times everyone was here...

...there was a plan to kill everyone out of mercy because...

...it was far too cruel to let everyone continue living after finding out the truth.

He lifts his head up and peers at Gonta, who tearfully looks back at him. He wonders if everyone else is cruel enough to vote for him in the first place. He knows Gonta is doing a terrible job at defending himself but, fuck, taking just one look at Gonta should be enough to prove his innocence in the first place. What sort of person openly weeps so humanly in front of everyone like this? Who willingly strips layer after layer until there's nothing to see but pure, raw emotion? And people are still doubting Gonta?

He just needs to say it, say that Tsumugi's the culprit. Monokuma can't save her if he testifies. He can put a stop to all this madness and...

"Think back to what you said before...about the rules."

...is the risk really worth it? Even if he rallies everyone to vote for Tsumugi, will Monokuma punish her? He...he doesn't know.

*He drags himself up the dark hallway, blood spewing from his lips. The world twists and turns with every step he takes but he needs to get out of here. He squeezes his bedroom key tightly in his hand as he finally makes it to the end. The wall collapses open and so does he, landing on top of a very startled Kaede. He tries to tell her, tries to warn her about Tsumugi but his throat is too full and everything is going fuzzy. Everything is going **dark**. So he presses his key into her hand instead because something tells him this isn't the end of the game, Tsumugi already promised him that Monokuma would protect her as she forced poison down his throat.*

...is...granting mercy the right thing to do? Someone like Gonta...doesn't belong in a game like this. He could never fight back against Tsumugi because he would refuse to see the worst in her.

...and it's not like he'll actually die because...if Gonta dies now then he'll just wake up later again.

(How could he think such a thing?)

Shouldn't the priority be...getting Tsumugi out of the game? If she survives then...she'll leave along with the other graduated students and no one will have to deal with her the next time they wake up here. Leaving will become an easier task without her around.

...ahaha, leaders really do have to make the hard decisions, don't they?

"Ouma? Ouma!" Tenko shakes his arm. "Did you fall asleep?"

But in a situation like this...having to pick to sacrifice someone as pure as Gonta or expose Tsumugi and risk having her in the next game to wreak havoc again.

He's tired. He's so tired.

“N-No...” Kokichi shakes his head. “I just...”

He *can't* do it. He can't be the cause of Gonta dying *again*.

“...think we should split the votes,” Kokichi mumbles. “Cause...I can't remember...I don't think I saw...I can't...recall what happened.”

“You want to split the vote?” Korekiyo echoes. “Is that the smartest idea?”

“If Shirogane and Gonta get an equal amount of votes then they'll both technically be voted as guilty,” Ryoma says. “Monokuma? If we vote for both of them then will both of them be punished?”

“Nope! Only the guilty will be!” Monokuma answers. “But be prepared to deal with the aftermath of doubting the student who doesn't get punished! You'll all have a lot of grovelling to do, you know?”

Tsumugi pales. “B-But I'm telling the truth, I swear!”

“But it's impossible to tell who is actually telling the truth,” Kiiibo tells her. “My apologies, Shirogane. I don't want to doubt either of you but...”

“Screw voting, I'm not putting up with this bullshit anymore!” Kaito slams a fist down hard onto the podium. “We've entertained you for long enough! Aren't you already satisfied? Angie's fucking dead and all you asked for was a damn corpse so-”

“Don't be so naïve, Momota!” Monokuma cackles. “This is only the beginning! Why have a killing game if you're only going to stop after the first murder?”

“Why you...”

“Momota, please calm down,” Kirumi says, grabbing his shaking hand. “I'm just as frustrated as you are but I can't allow you to do anything rash. As much as it pains me to say this we have to vote or else we're all going to die.”

“Yeah, well, maybe that's for the best,” Kaito responds bitterly. “At least then we don't have to stoop down to Monokuma's level to survive!”

“Well it's your funeral, spaceman,” Monokuma says. “

“Momota, stop being stupid,” Korekiyo sighs. “Dying now will mean Angie's death will be meaningless. At least have some respect for her.”

“...tch...” Kaito turns his head to the side with a grimace.

“So are we splitting the vote or what?” Miu asks, wiping her cheeks that are still stained with old tears. “You fuckers better promise to vote right because I refuse to die here.”

“...it's impossible for every single one of us to promise that we'll vote accordingly,” Kirumi points out. She wrings her hands down by her waist. “However, I believe that it'll benefit all of us if we promise to vote for who we say we are. I'll begin, I shall cast a vote for Shirogane.”

“I'll vote for Gonta,” Korekiyo responds. “Although I can't understand why he would do such a thing, he hasn't argued well at all.”

“Tenko will also vote for Gonta,” Tenko says before clearing her throat uncomfortably. “Even

though Gonta is the least degenerate male she's ever met."

"...Shirogane," Ryoma murmurs lowly, tugging on his hat.

"I'll vote for Gonta to balance it out," Kiibo says.

"I'll vote for big dick too I guess," Miu adds, licking her lips. "N-Nothing personal, of course. I just..."

"Who Gonta...who Gonta vote for?" Gonta asks sadly. "Gonta vote for himself, right?"

"No, vote for Shirogane," Ryoma tells him. "And Shirogane has to vote for Gonta. That way you can't betray each other."

"...I said I believed in Gonta from the start so I'll..." Kaito shoots Monokuma a look of disgust. "Vote for Shirogane."

Tenko nudges Kokichi's arm. "Hey, degenerate. That means you have to vote for Shirogane too. You got that?"

"Vote for Shirogane?" Kokichi repeats. "F-Fine by me."

"So you all want to end the discussion then?" Monokuma asks. "Wow, this has to be one of the quickest class trials yet."

"Well it wasn't like there was much to discuss," Korekiyo says with a sniff. "And since it's impossible to prove who is guilty then splitting the vote seems like the most logical conclusion."

"Very well then," Monokuma says, his eyes shining. "It's voting time!"

Kokichi watches hazily as everyone around him votes. He presses down on the first blur of blue he can find on his tablet and returns to pressing his face into his arm. His head feels like it's full of cotton and his hands feel so *cold*. All he wants is to sleep for a hundred years, no, *forever*.

He watches through barely open eyes as a screen drops down in front of them and shows a tally of lights. He sees five lights by Gonta's picture and lazily rolls his eyes over to Tsumugi's picture.

Which only has four lights by it.

He blinks slowly. Huh. That can't be right.

"Who the fuck voted for someone who isn't even here?!" Miu screeches, tugging on her hair.

Kokichi sees a light next to a picture of...a boy with blue hair wearing a cap. He looks down at his podium and almost chokes when he spots that his vote was casted for the Ultimate Detective.

Oh *shit*.

"Is this some sort of joke?" Ryoma asks, shooting Gonta a worried glance as the entomologist stares at the board with wide eyes.

"Gonta...got most votes?" Gonta quietly asks, hands dropping uselessly by his sides. "W-Why?"

"Did your board glitch?" Kirumi asks. "Monokuma, you heard us discuss what we planned to do. You know that the votes were meant to be split equally. There must be some sort of mistake-"

"I don't do revotes," Monokuma says firmly. "So I advise you all to be extra careful when casting them."

"Isn't it a little useless to tell us that *after* voting?" Kiibo says, rolling his eyes.

Tsumugi stares at the board with a puzzled expression. "Why did someone...vote wrong?"

"A misclick, perhaps?" Ryoma sighs in frustration.

"Well it wasn't me!" Kaito yells. "So don't start blaming me!"

"There's no point in arguing over it," Korekiyo says. "All that matters is whether or not someone's slip up has cost us our lives. Well, Monokuma? Did we vote right or not?"

Monokuma stares down the group silently. It was like he was purposefully trying to drive the group insane. A smile starts to grow larger and larger and larger on his face to the point where it almost looks like it's going to split his face in half.

"...you all voted *correctly*," Monokuma finally announces. "The one who killed Angie Yonaga was no other than Gonta Gokuhara."

...ha...so Tsumugi *was* right. Monokuma is always going to protect her no matter the situation. Kokichi slips down his podium.

"But...but..." Gonta's voice quivers. The gentle giant trembles as he clutches his beloved green box in his hands, as if it would bring him comfort. "Gonta...really doesn't understand. Gonta didn't...he really *didn't*..."

"Oh quit lying already you two faced fucker!" Miu yells, jamming her finger in his face. "How *dare* you pretend that you're innocent! You almost got us all killed you good for nothing piece of--"

"That's *enough*," Ryoma snaps as his expression turns dark. "Don't speak to him like that."

"Hee..." Miu curls up on herself. "B-But that fucker--"

"Gonta...why did you do it?" Kirumi asks gently. "Was it because of the time limit?"

"Gonta...Gonta didn't..." He sobs pitifully. "Gonta no understand why Monokuma...say Gonta guilty when he not...Gonta just wanted to be gentleman so..."

"Well if he says he didn't do it then I believe him!" Kaito declares, cracking his knuckles.

Korekiyo rolls his eyes, acting like Kaito just said something groundbreakingly stupid. "If Gonta isn't guilty then why did Monokuma accept him as the killer? He'll be breaking his own rules if he punishes Gonta and he's not guilty."

"W-Well..." Kaito shakes his head. "Still! I fucking refuse to let him punish Gonta!"

"Even though Monokuma says we're correct I can't help but think something is wrong," Kiibo admits, rubbing his chin. "It just doesn't make sense why Gonta would attack so many people in such a brutal way. If he wanted to stop the time limit then why didn't he just stop at killing one person? Hurting Shirogane and stabbing Ouma just doesn't make any sense."

"I-I think he just lost it," Tsumugi timidly says. "I think he was so caught up in the moment that..."

"Tenko...isn't sure why Gonta did what he did but..." She fiddles with the end of one of her

pigtails. “Tenko is just so sad that things ended up the way they did.”

“We’ve been spared from the time limit but at what cost?” Korekiyo murmurs, closing his eyes.

“Geez, do you all have to be so dramatic?” Monokuma sighs. “All this sobbing and whining is giving me a headache.”

“Like we care about how you feel!” Kaito rolls his sleeves up as he marches over to the bear.

“Hey! Don’t think we’re just going to let you take Gonta away from us so easily! This entire game is a fucking joke and I’m not letting you take anymore lives!”

“T-That’s right!” Tenko joins him, readying her fists. “If Tenko has to fight Monokuma then so be it!”

“G-Guys, you know fighting Monokuma is prohibited, right?” Tsumugi points out helplessly.

“Fuck the rules,” Kaito snaps. “If we let him take Gonta away from us then that means he’ll think he can continue the game!”

“Kid, I’m getting my game no matter how many cliché speeches you give,” Monokuma says.

“Your childish little rebellion doesn’t phase me at all. I’d punish you but, *whoops*, it looks like my paw just slipped!”

“And what’s that supposed to mean-” Tenko barely manages to say before a large chain flies through the air.

It wraps around Gonta’s neck and the entomologist claws at it in confusion then in horror as it drags him up, up, up into the air.

“G-Gonta!” Kiibo cries out in alarm.

Kokichi watches from the floor, feeling numb as Gonta is yanked from the room with not the chance to say any final words. He gags and presses a hand to his mouth as the overwhelming urge to vomit creeps up on him.

He struggles to even watch as the punishment plays out, eyes stinging as...

He spots Tsumugi from the corner of his eye, watching the punishment in childlike wonder and glee, hands clasped to her chest in awe.

He slips from the room before anyone notices him, riding the elevator back up alone. He shivers violently the entire ride up, his hand loosely pressing against his wound. He doesn’t feel like he’s even in his own body as he stumbles back to the dormitory alone, walking past Angie’s body without a word.

Kokichi locks his door behind him before falling into his bathroom and empties the contents of his stomach out into the toilet. Only the burning sensation in the back of his throat and his wound throbbing furiously keeps him grounded.

He’s vaguely aware that there’s tears mixed in with his vomit but it takes him a while to realise that they’re coming from him. Once his stomach finally settles he slumps down the side of his bathtub and wipes his eyes with his sleeve, barely managing to choke back a broken laugh as he realises how utterly fucked up everything is.

The worst part? He could’ve stopped all of this.

And he didn't.

Kokichi Ouma - Chapter 2 Part 1

Chapter Notes

Thanks for 400+ kudos!!!

Honestly this chapter took several attempts to write. Like every time I sat down to write I just couldn't write what I wanted to. However, I am extremely pleased with how this chapter turned out. It might be even a strong contender for one of my favourite chapters yet! I just really like writing characters interacting and that is literally what this chapter is lmao

Anyway, thanks to anyone who left a comment last chapter! They really do mean a lot ahaha

Thanks for reading and I hope you all have a nice day!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

He inevitably becomes bedbound. Not by choice, of course. No, there are plenty of factors as to why he's currently 'trapped' (Kokichi's words, no one else's) in Kirumi's bed (long story) at the moment.

The biggest and probably most prominent factor is most likely the *very* deep and *very* painful stab wound he has. It's kind of fascinating how the human body decides to be a little bitch over losing a tiny bit of blood. Well, perhaps *tiny* is a bit of an understatement. Perhaps more so quite a lot of blood, at least enough to soak through his clothes and drip onto the floor obnoxiously enough to create a trail going to his bedroom. Also, his bathroom floor isn't looking so good at the moment. Hmm. That's going to be a pain in the ass to clean later on.

But that's not the biggest problem he has right now. Actually he has several problems all ongoing at the moment, some more less life threatening than others but, ah, well, all of them are as equally as annoying.

So apparently, leaving to go and throw up in your bathroom whilst an innocent student gets punished is like, not normal. Seemingly. And, well, leaving unannounced with a stab wound that was oh so kindly given to him by the mastermind of the game is also a huge no no too. Who would've thought, right? Clearly he was on some sort of self destructive roll last night that just didn't sit right with some students. Mainly Kirumi, who was furious that he locked himself in his room with an unstitched wound. Kaito also seemed pissed off about something for some reason and of course Tsumugi started wailing about how she didn't want another student to die.

Eventually, he managed to pull himself out of his room and lock the door behind him before anyone could see inside because, hmm, the state of his bedroom is a can of worms he will not be opening any time soon, thank you very much. Kirumi, of course, tried to usher him back into his room so Kokichi, of course, very smartly decided to walk away (he did not walk away, it was more so a drunken stumble caused by heavy blood loss) and was of course caught by Kirumi, who decided that if he wasn't going to play nice and go to his room then he would have to go to hers instead.

The maid ended up stitching his side. Very professionally, naturally, yet that didn't mean it didn't fucking hurt. There was a lot of cleaning involved and stitching and needles and yuck, yuck, yuck. He cringes now just thinking about it. He did point out that he was very capable of sorting himself out. Sort of. He definitely didn't stumble over his words and slur all of his sentences together. Just because Kirumi couldn't decipher his long speech of 'IcandothismyselfprobablyIhavetotallydonethisbeforewhyareyoulookingatmelikethatdidn'tyouknowI'mac doesn't mean he was lying. Just, embellishing the truth a little.

Now several hours later and a very restless night (no, he did not sleep for several reasons because every time he closed his eyes, all he saw was Gonta's tear stained face) he is still very much stuck in the same bed he planned to escape hours ago. Unfortunately, Kirumi has some sort of sixth sense for knowing that Ultimate Supreme Leaders can and will retreat from any situation that will make them look weak and decided to keep an eye on him all night.

She looks justifiably exhausted and he doubts it's only just the all nighter that has made her this way. There is this crystal clear look of sadness in her eyes and it looks like the events of last night have left her looking more than haunted. He wonders if everyone else is going to look the same as her.

According to Kirumi, Monokuma took great pleasure in taunting them all after the trial. He reduced Miu and Tenko to tears, left Kaito's face purple with rage and had promised that things are only going to get better from here on out. That promise was probably more so directed for the bear himself but hey, kudos for Monokuma for playing the role of a dickhead villain so well.

She does remarkably well with dancing around certain topics. She doesn't bring up Gonta at all and doesn't bring up the fact he was attacked. She doesn't even bring up the fact he left way before everyone else. At least she's smart enough to figure out that bringing up any of the previously mentioned topics will result in her head being bitten off by Kokichi himself. She does, for a second, bring up Angie and mentions something about her finding a secret passageway before clamping up again.

So allegedly, Angie told everyone about the passageway in the bathroom. Fine. Whatever. What is frustrating, however, is that the door wouldn't open when Angie brought everyone to it. Some people thought she was lying and was just becoming desperate. Some people thought she was trying to lure everyone into a trap. Some people believed her but due to the time limit, couldn't indulge in the act of getting the door open. It makes Kokichi wonder if the door refusing to open was intentional or not.

Maybe if Angie hadn't walked in on him and Tsumugi when she did, she would've just been taken out on a later date. Tsumugi did seem pissed off that Angie told people about the doorway.

Her body got moved during the night too. Probably by Monokuma or Tsumugi. He didn't hear anything though and neither did Kirumi. She was planning to sort out Angie herself when she noticed that everything was bleached clean already. Kokichi wonders what happened to Angie's body.

He frowns and bunches his hands into the bedsheets quietly. Suffice to say that things really aren't going well at all. In under twelve hours there have already been two deaths. And he got stabbed but that really isn't that important in the grand scale of things. A minor inconvenience at best. If only Kirumi would let him jump out of bed and prove to her and everyone else that he's fine and he really doesn't appreciate being babied.

"I really should start getting breakfast ready," Kirumi comments suddenly. Clearly the only reason why she hasn't left yet is because of him. "However, I think it's for the best if we wait for

someone else to come and keep an eye on you.”

“A little rude, don’t you think?” Kokichi says.

“After what happened last night I think I have every right to be a little wary,” Kirumi responds before sighing. “I understand your frustrations but you’re injured, Ouma. You left before I could even help you and when you did eventually leave your room you weren’t exactly a model patient.”

Kokichi shrugs. “Getting stitches tickled.”

“Surprisingly, I wasn’t referring to that,” Kirumi says. “In fact, you barely flinched during that whole process. I was alluding to the fact that you ran away in the first place. You knew you were hurt yet hid yourself away because anyone could help you. Why?”

“A bit of a loaded question, don’t you think?” Kokichi pulls a face. “Maybe I just found watching someone be punished too boring so I left to find something else better to do?”

Kirumi’s face pinches in a mixture of annoyance and worry. “I think even you know that you’re purposefully lying now.”

“And I think you know that what I do isn’t any of your business,” Kokichi responds. “So be a good little maid and mind your own business, capiche?”

Kirumi lets out a long and suffering sigh. “Even though I fully understand that it is not my place to ask such personal questions, please try to understand that I truly do care for everyone here-”

“Because that’s your job, right?” Kokichi raises a brow. “Listen, no one is paying you to act like you care about any of us, you know? So you can drop the act because the only person you should care about in a situation like this is yourself. Don’t pretend that you don’t think otherwise.”

Her expression turns sour. “None of this is an act, Ouma. I can reassure you that I genuinely do-”

“Care for people that you’ve only known for what, like, a couple days at best?” Kokichi rolls his eyes. “I probably care more about my *shoes* than any person here.”

“Is that so?” Kirumi challenges.

“Yep,” Kokichi answers with a firm nod of his head.

“Well that is very unfortunate to hear,” Kirumi says, looking annoyingly calm. “But you do realise that pushing everyone away isn’t going to help you out in the long run? You might not know everyone well right now but-”

Kokichi scoffs. “Sure, let’s waste time making friends with people who are probably going to die, like, tomorrow.”

Kirumi purses her lips. “And what if we manage to escape before something else drastic happens? Would you think creating bonds with everyone would be a waste then?”

“Oh yeah, absolutely,” Kokichi answers. “Do you honestly think after leaving we’re all going to keep in touch with each other? Like, are we all going to act like nothing happened and swap phone numbers like we’re kids or something? Or even better, someone will be stupid enough to make a group chat and try to get us to talk about our feelings.”

Kirumi eyes him cautiously. “You certainly have a warped perception when it comes to

friendship.”

“That’s because Supreme Leaders don’t do friends,” Kokichi says. “We do allies or enemies. Anything else is just a trivial waste of time.”

“If that’s the case then shouldn’t you consider making some allies here then?” Kirumi asks, her voice border-lining sounding almost sarcastic. She clears her throat. “I don’t wish to become your enemy, Ouma. In fact, I don’t think anyone here wants to purposefully make an enemy of everyone.”

“Are you trying to give me advice?” Kokichi asks, faking an expression of incredulous surprise. He puts a hand to his chest. “Wow, you really don’t know your place, do you?”

“And what is my place then?” Kirumi fires back. “Since you clearly think I’m incompetent enough to not know it.”

Wow, someone’s feeling feisty. “You’re the Ultimate Maid. Don’t you have something to clean?”

“Being the Ultimate Maid doesn’t just mean I clean things,” Kirumi responds with a grimace. “It’s my duty to care for everyone around me, whether they realise they need helping or not. I pick up the slack of others when they need help. It is my purpose to help those around me reach their true potential. If cleaning after them helps them then so be it. If I need to be a shoulder to cry on then that is what I’ll be. If someone needs someone to simply listen to them then I will listen.”

“And if I request for you to stop talking?” Kokichi asks.

“Then this room will be silent,” Kirumi answers, clasping her hands down by her waist. “However, with the state you’re in I cannot in good conscience leave you alone, even if that’s what you want.”

“What? You don’t think I’m capable of looking after myself?” Kokichi snuffles, wiping a fake tear.

Kirumi looks him dead in the eyes. “That is correct, which is why I’m here.”

Oh wow. “Tch, lame,” Kokichi murmurs. “And very presumptuous too. I should have your tongue cut off for this slander.”

“You didn’t sleep a wink last night,” Kirumi says. “Additionally, I didn’t see you eat a bite of anything I made yesterday for breakfast and I also know for a fact that you didn’t eat lunch or dinner either. The only reason why I haven’t made you anything as of now is because the kitchen isn’t open yet.”

“Are you like, stalking me or something?” Kokichi asks. “Unless you’ve got a creepy obsession with me because who the hell takes note of things like that?”

“A professional maid,” Kirumi replies. Her expression suddenly turns scarily strict. “And you will not be leaving this room without a solid couple hours of sleep and a proper meal. I’ll watch over you all day if I have to and if I’m not available then I’m sure I’ll find someone else to do so instead.”

“What are you, my mother?” Kokichi grumbles. “And what’s stopping me from leaving right now, hmm? Going to handcuff me to the bed?”

“If you can even make it to the door then I’ll happily let you leave,” Kirumi surprisingly says. “However, I would highly advise that you don’t even attempt to get out of bed in the state you’re in. You lost a lot of blood last night and you’re not going to recover as quickly as you think.”

“Oh? So you’re a professional doctor now, are you?” Kokichi flutters his eyelashes. “Tell me, doctor, aren’t you basically going against all of my human rights by keeping me here without my permission?”

“Are you planning on being difficult during our entire stay here?” Kirumi asks.

“Yuck, don’t make it sound like we’re at some resort or something,” Kokichi says with a roll of his eyes. “We’re being forced to kill each other in a secluded location by a homicidal teddy bear. There’s a big difference.”

Kirumi sighs, adjusting her gloves as she turns her back on him to check the time. “It’s almost time for the morning announcement. I’ll wait until I hear movement from the others and bring someone else here to look after you whilst I make breakfast.” She pauses. “Do you by any chance have any allergies?”

“So you can make me something that’ll kill me?” Kokichi scrunches his nose up. “I’m not dense enough to tell you something like that. If you want to kill me then at least be more creative. Sabotaging my food is totally boring.”

He must’ve struck a nerve because Kirumi’s shoulders suddenly go stiff. “I would *never* betray someone’s trust in me by killing them in such a way. It is my duty to care for others, not kill them. I ask that you refrain from ever suggesting such a thing again.”

“But still...” Kokichi licks his lips. “Have you ever been in a situation like this before? It’s a little naïve to think that everyone is going to automatically trust you just because you’re so nice to everyone. You basically have the power to kill everyone in one shot, you know? One slip of the hand and whoops, it looks like you’ve just poisoned everyone’s meals and, oh no, it looks like everyone is dying now because you killed them!”

“Do you really think that low of me?” Kirumi asks quietly, bowing her head. Her hair curtains her face. “Because I’ll tell you until I’m blue in the face that I would never dream of doing something like that.”

“Words are just words,” Kokichi says. “And everyone here is capable of making promises that they might intend to keep. Doesn’t stop them from being swayed one way or another at some point though.”

Kirumi turns to look at him with an unreadable expression on her face. “Why is it that you always jump to the worst case scenario for everything?”

“Because someone has to,” Kokichi answers. “It’s not friendship that’s going to keep everyone alive here. It’s *doubt*. If you want to delude yourself with the idea that everyone here is going to get along from now on then it’s your funeral.”

“...of course I’m not naïve enough to think that everything is going to be okay from now on,” Kirumi says so quietly that he almost misses what she said. “If someone like Gonta is capable of killing Angie the way he did then of course I’m going to be more wary of everyone, even if it does pain me to do so.”

Kokichi swallows, turning his head to the side.

“But that also means I’m not going to turn my back on everyone either,” Kirumi adds. “We’re all equals here and as saddened as I am about what happened with Gonta and Angie, we can’t let their deaths be meaningless. There’s no time to turn on each other. Escaping or putting a stop to the

killing game should be our number one priority.”

Ah, the same old blabber of escaping and stopping the game. Of course.

“I’m sure you feel the same way too,” Kirumi says. “Even if you’ll never admit it.”

“I’m the Ultimate Supreme Leader of Evil,” Kokichi reminds her. “I’m actually in my element right now.”

“Someone evil would’ve stayed to watch Gonta’s punishment,” Kirumi tells him. “Call yourself evil all you want. You’re just a menace at best.”

“And you’re never going to find work ever again,” Kokichi retorts coldly. “As soon as I leave here I’m going to tell every contact I know to never hire you again.”

“Yes, well, I don’t usually work for...” Kirumi eyes him slowly. “Youngsters such as yourself anyway. I’m sure I’ll survive even if you slander me to your so-called contacts.”

“Are you suggesting I don’t have serious contacts?” Kokichi’s face twists. “Are you sure you want to gamble your entire career on such a presumption? Because I can ruin you in a matter of seconds-”

“Be my guest,” Kirumi says. “Because I’ll always have the satisfaction of knowing I’m right.”

The absolute nerve. “Ah, but you’re not right so it sucks to be you.”

“Whatever you say.” The maid checks the time again and clicks her tongue impatiently. “I wish the morning announcement would play already.”

“What? Is my presence not enough for you?” Kokichi asks. “Don’t tell me you’re bored of me already.”

Kirumi sighs. “Please stop jumping to meaningless conclusions. You very well know why I want to leave and surprisingly it’s not because of your horrible attitude. If you’re trying to scare me off then I must warn you that I’ve dealt with worse people than you over the course of my career.”

Kokichi scoffs. “Is that so?”

“Indeed. Your childish antics do not phase me,” Kirumi says. “Nor will they ever will.”

“Hmm, that sounds like a challenge to me,” Kokichi responds. “Well, I guess I should up my game, huh? You’ll regret ever calling my super evil actions just mere childish antics.”

“Ah yes, I am filled with so much fear from hearing you say that,” Kirumi says in a tone that suggests that she is not, in fact, filled with fear. She lets out a sigh of relief when the monitor in her bedroom flickers to life, although she does scowl when Monokuma blabbers on about how it’s time to wake up and death. It’s a very unlikely combination that doesn’t really work. “Hopefully someone will wake up soon and take my place watching over you. Although...” She pauses. “Do you have anyone in particular you want to be in here with you? Whilst I don’t particularly want to wake anyone up, I suppose one early morning won’t hurt.”

“Haha, *no*,” Kokichi easily answers before hesitating for a split second. What if Kirumi picks Tsumugi of all people to look after him? Hmm, that won’t do at all. Absolutely not. Nuh-uh.

“Although I would prefer if a male stayed with me for...” Kokichi pulls a face. “...male reasons.”

“Male reasons,” Kirumi echoes flatly. She sighs. “I’ll see what I can do.”

Excellent. That will remove Tsumugi, Tenko and Miu from the list of potential bedside buddies. Tsumugi is an automatic no-go and Tenko will probably snap his spine for even looking in her direction. Miu is also a terrible choice because she’s Miu and that’s a valid enough reason alone.

Kirumi peeks her head around her door and he hears her wave someone over. Huh, looks like someone's up early. He can’t tell if Kirumi timed her search just right or if someone purposefully left their room early for some reason. Kokichi clasps his hands together in his lap as he watches Kirumi open her door a little wider and...

...ah, of course. *Of course* Kaito Momota, the most obnoxious, purple haired man on the planet is here right now. It’s almost as if the universe hates him. At least Kirumi is surprisingly playful enough to banter with him. Kaito is probably going to burst his eardrums lecturing him about space and friendship and something else cringeworthy.

Maybe if he plays dead then he’ll be left alone? It could work.

“Good morning, Momota,” Kirumi greets Kaito with a small smile. “I hope you’re doing well this morning.”

“I’m great!” Kaito sounds way too cheerful for someone who just found a body only mere hours ago and watched someone be brutally tortured to death. He’s obviously lying.

Even Kirumi looks doubtful. “Are you sure? You do look rather pale. Did you not sleep well last night?”

“Huh? Me?” Kaito blinks. “I slept like a baby!”

“That’s because you are a baby!” Kokichi helpfully calls out from Kirumi’s bed.

Kaito’s grin falters before he clears his throat loudly. “The real question is did either of you get any sleep? Tojo, no offence but you look rather tired.”

“I will admit, I didn’t sleep much last night,” Kirumi says, awkwardly readjusting her gaze towards the wall instead of looking at the astronaut. “Actually, I didn’t sleep a wink.”

“Then what are you doing up?!” Kaito looks scandalised. “You’re not going to be in top form if you’re tired! I’m sure that there’s plenty of spare beds for you to use if you want to get a couple hours of-”

“I know my limits,” Kirumi reassures him. “And this is not the first time I’ve ever had to pull an all-nighter. Being an astronaut, surely you must understand that you sometimes find that there’s simply not enough hours in a day to get everything done.”

Kaito laughs. “Oh yeah, I’m well aware. I’ve pulled hundreds of all-nighters just so I could study for exams. Passed them all with flying colours too!”

Before Kokichi can tell him that literally no one asked, Kirumi responds to the astronaut with a pleased smile. “I’m happy to hear that, Momota. There must be lots of studying involved when it comes to training to become an astronaut.”

“Haha, well, it’ll be worth it in the end!” Kaito concludes before slamming his fists together. “I’m planning to go to space as soon as possible!”

“Yes, well, I hope you manage to go one day,” Kirumi says. The implication behind her words are a harsh reminder that Kaito has the huge obstacle of surviving a killing game to deal with first.

“Yeah, me too!” Kaito smiles brightly. “So, why did you call me over? Nothing bad happened overnight, right?”

“I simply need someone to keep an eye on him,” Kirumi says as she thrusts her head over in Kokichi’s direction. “Whilst I make breakfast for everyone.”

“I can watch over myself,” Kokichi responds with a heavy roll of his eyes. “Besides, Momota must’ve left his room early for a reason so asking him to do such a thing is only going to be a distraction for him so-”

“Actually, I left early because I wanted to talk to you in particular,” Kaito says and Kokichi immediately deflates. Well *shit*. What the hell did he do to deserve this? “So if anything this arrangement is actually kind of perfect.”

“I see,” Kirumi says with a smile. “That’s a relief to hear.”

“I still don’t remember asking for anyone to help me,” Kokichi grumbles, crossing his arms. “You’re both being so unreasonably mean. Are you both enjoying ganging up on me? Do you like bullying injured victims when you know they can’t fight back? How ruthless of you both!”

Kirumi sighs heavily whilst Kaito frowns at the accusation. “Now wait just one damn second-”

“He’s been like this all morning,” Kirumi informs the astronaut, speaking as if Kokichi wasn’t only just a couple feet away. “You’ll get used to it. Eventually. Just...please refrain from starting an argument if you can.”

“Oh? You’re asking the local hothead to not start an argument?” Kokichi raises a brow. “Sheesh, you’re basically asking for a miracle.”

“Maybe I should ask someone else to come here instead,” Kirumi mumbles mostly to herself.

Kaito quickly shakes his head. “Nah, it’s like I said. I have shit I need to say to him so don’t worry about us.”

Kirumi hesitates before allowing her shoulders to relax. “If that’s the case then I should get going. If you would both excuse me.” She bows before leaving her own bedroom, closing the door behind her carefully.

Kokichi makes sure that the sigh that escapes from him is loud and obnoxious. “So...has Momota decided that he wants to declare his undying love for me? Because if so then you’ll have to wait your turn because I have hundreds of people I need to decline first before I get to you so-”

“Do you want to explain what the hell happened last night?” Kaito asks abruptly. He sits down heavily on the chair Kirumi left by her bed and leans backwards with his arms crossed. Is he trying to look intimidating or something? “You left without saying a damn word to Monokuma!”

“So?” Kokichi pulls a face.

“Aren’t you pissed off about what he did?” Kaito asks. “Never mind the fact he forced a time limit on us, the way he killed Gonta was just pure torture! No one ever deserves to die like that.” His jaw locks. “But at least everyone was there with Gonta during his last moments. You left. Why?”

“That’s what you’re pissed off about?” Kokichi asks incredulously. “That I left before I got the chance to watch Gonta actually die?”

Kaito grimaces. “It’s about the respect, man. Just because he did something...terrible doesn’t mean he should’ve died so brutally. The least you could’ve done for him is to stick around with him to the very end.”

“Momota, I was *bleeding out*,” Kokichi responds, feeling like he’s talking to a dumb kid who doesn’t understand a single thing. “I was hurt. What? Is making sure that...” He licks his lips. “That a murderer feels comforted in their final moments more important than keeping an alive person safe?”

“You locked yourself in your damn bedroom,” Kaito points out. “Do you know how long we were all banging on your door for? Nearly half an hour.”

He didn’t know that. “Well as previously established, I wasn’t doing well.”

“Just...” Kaito sighs heavily. “Why’d you leave? I get that...he was the one who attacked you and all but...”

“I felt sick,” Kokichi says. It’s not entirely a lie. “And I couldn’t watch any longer.”

Kaito grimaces as he starts to look him up and down. “...still, why did you cause trouble for everyone else after the trial? You should’ve seen how panicked Tojo was when she couldn’t find you.”

“I didn’t ask for her to worry,” Kokichi mumbles. “Besides, it’s not like she actually cares. She just wants everyone to think she does so she has everyone wrapped around her little finger. It’s people like her you gotta watch out for, you know? She might be all nice and motherly right now but I bet she’s waiting for the right moment to stab us all in the back.”

“Holy shit...” Kaito’s eyes go wide. “You don’t actually think that, do you?”

“Of course,” Kokichi answers with a small huff. “If someone like...” He swallows. “If someone like *Gonta* managed to snap and do such horrible things then whose to say Tojo won’t do the same. Or Kiibo. Or Shirogane. They may all look and act innocent but it’s not like we all know each other now, do we?”

Kaito blinks at him in stunned silence. “Dude seriously...is that how you really think?”

“I don’t know why you look so surprised,” Kokichi says. “I should be the one who’s surprised at how dense everyone here is. We. Don’t. Know. Each. Other. You can’t expect me to trust complete strangers when no one here has given me a single reason to trust them in the first place.”

Kaito frowns as he looks down at the floor for a moment. The gears in his brain must be working overtime or something since he goes silent for a couple of moments before his eyes light up. “If that’s your problem then I’ll just prove to you that you can trust me and everyone else here then!”

“Hah?” Kokichi tilts his head to the side. “Were you dropped on the head as a baby or something?”

“I’m serious,” Kaito says, leaning forward with a satisfied grin. “It was bugging me all night trying to figure out what your deal is but, man, I’m sorta surprised I figured out your problem so easily.”

Oh hell no. “Momota? What the actual fuck are you on about?”

“You’re a coward,” Kaito says proudly and if Kokichi had the energy to do so then he would’ve punched him hard. “But that’s okay! I can work with with that so-”

“Do you want to tell me how you managed to jump to such a stupid conclusion?” Kokichi asks. He swears one of his eyes is twitching.

“Well only a coward would go out of their way to purposefully not make friends,” Kaito says and Kokichi almost gags at the word ‘friends.’ “But I get it now. You’re just scared of opening up, aren’t you?”

“Have you ever actually said an intelligent thing in your life?” Kokichi fires back. “Or were you just born naturally dumb?”

“Quit being a dick, man,” Kaito grumbles. “Just because I’m right-”

“There’s no way in hell that you’re right,” Kokichi snaps. “And for you of all people to call me a coward is pretty rich, don’t you think?”

“Hey! What’s that supposed to mean?” Kaito’s brows furrow together.

“You act like some big superhero big shot but deep down you’re nothing but a scared, pathetic, cowardly *mess* who is absolutely terrified right now,” Kokichi says slowly. “You wasted so much time hunting down Monokuma yesterday because you were petrified about what would happen if you didn’t find him. Instead of facing up to the fact that someone had to die for us to escape, you picked the cowardly option of staying in denial instead.”

“Now hold on one fucking second,” Kaito grits out. The chair falls to the floor as he stands up abruptly, digging his fists into the side of the mattress as he leans forward to inch his face closer. “You’re *wrong*. Of course I knew the easiest option to save everyone was to sacrifice someone but I’m not heartless enough to do that. Everyone here deserves to live-”

“Does it matter that we all deserve to live? Doesn’t mean we’re all going to make it out of this game alive,” Kokichi spits out. “So I don’t need some deluded, idiot astronaut lecturing me about friendship and things only little kids care about. I plan to survive this killing game and I don’t give a single shit who has to die in order for me to get out of here alive.”

Kaito’s face turns red. “Why you-”

“We weren’t put into this game to make friends, dipshit,” Kokichi says. “Monokuma wants us to kill each other and if we don’t then he’ll just kill us instead. So please, for the love of God, open your fucking eyes and think *real* hard about what you say next because if you say one more stupid thing then I really will lose my shit.”

Kaito’s fists tremble against the mattress. At least he’s actually taking a moment to think things through, although Kokichi is fairly confident that Kaito is calling him every insult under the sun in his head. He makes sure to give the astronaut a challenging look even if he can’t see it. However, he’s certain that Kaito must be able to feel the weight of his stare.

After what feels like an eternity, Kaito lifts his head back up and glares fiercely into his eyes.

“I still think you’re a coward,” Kaito tells him. He speaks over Kokichi when he tries to speak. “And a fucking *liar* because no actual human being with a shred of decency would say the shit you just said for no reason.”

“Oh, is that what you think?”

“No, it’s what I *believe*,” Kaito says firmly. “So insult me all you want but we both know that all you’re doing is lashing out because a small part of you knows I’m right and you don’t want to admit it.”

Kokichi blinks before barely concealing a snort and wow, does he fail spectacularly. He presses a hand to his mouth to try and stifle the laughter that spills from his lips like a waterfall. “D-Do you really think that your dumb speech is going to make me suddenly fall to my knees like some helpless saddo and beg for your help?” He wipes a tear from the corner of his eye. “Oh, this is really too much. It’s too much! Do you have any more clichés you want to say or have you finally realised you’ve probably embarrassed yourself enough already?”

Kaito clearly doesn’t expect Kokichi’s reaction as his jaw drops. “Dude, what the fuck?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Am I going off script?” Kokichi wipes another tear as he tries to stop laughing. “It’s just, how the hell did you actually expect this conversation to go? Did you honestly think I was going to break down in front of you and admit I need help? If you want someone to help to stroke your fragile little ego then you’ve come to the wrong person.”

“That’s not what I want!” Kaito insists. “And this,” he gestures to the entirety of Kokichi, “is just proof that I’m right about my hunch. You do need help-”

“Even if I do, I haven’t asked for help, have I?” Kokichi rolls his eyes. “And it’s so obvious that you’re only looking for some loser to project your own problems on, aren’t you? You’re the coward and you’re just too scared to admit it so you’ve decided to make your problems into someone else’s. Newsflash, I don’t care about whatever crisis you’re going through, spaceman.”

Kaito backs down for a moment, running a hand through his hair in disbelief. It’s not clearly what he’s the most frazzled about but it’s obvious Kokichi has managed to strike a nerve. Hard. “You know what, you’re right,” Kaito says, shaking his head with a bewildered laugh. “You’re not a coward. At least a coward wants to better themselves deep down.”

“Finally, you’re saying something right for-”

“You’re absolutely *petrified*, aren’t you?” Kaito says and the room goes quiet enough to hear a pin drop. “You’re like a wild animal acting out and they only do that when they’ve been cornered. Something is scaring you so badly that it’s reducing you to this.”

“Shut. Up.”

“Is it the killing game?” Kaito continues innocently. God, he actually does look genuinely concerned. “Is that what’s scaring you? Or did getting attacked unexpectedly spook you more than you care to let on?”

“You’re really testing my patience, Momota,” Kokichi warns. “Although I must admit I’m almost impressed that you have the audacity to say such...” He curls his fists tighter into his blanket. “Bullshit.”

“Seriously, what’s your problem?!” Kaito’s fist twitches. “It’s almost like you’re trying to piss me off!”

“And the penny has finally dropped!” Kokichi throws his hands up. “I know this might be hard because you have a very tiny brain but try to recall the amount of times where I have actually asked for your help during this conversation.”

“Dude-”

“Don’t forget that you’re the one who approached me,” Kokichi says as uses his fingers to start listing things off. “You tell me that I caused trouble for everyone even though I was the one who was attacked and injured. You get pissed off that I didn’t want to watch someone die. You call me a coward to my face, thinking that I would thank you for it. You proceed to get even more pissed off that I don’t want your help, which is something I never asked for in the first place!”

He feels a drop of sweat run down the side of his head.

“But oh no, I’m the one who is in the wrong here,” Kokichi snarls. “All because I have the brains to not trust people who are in the same killing game as me and could kill me at any given point.”

Kaito blinks slowly and goes uncharacteristically silent. It’s almost as if all the fight in him suddenly slithered away like smoke from a fire. He collapses back into his chair, gripping the arms of the chair tightly as a thoughtful expression takes over his face.

Oh geez, he’s broken Kaito.

Kokichi uncomfortably readjusts his blankets, clearing his throat as he does so. His head feels like it’s spinning. Maybe he shouldn’t have started yelling. He tries to ignore the build up of static that grows in his ears.

“So that’s what you really think, huh?” Kaito says quietly. Or maybe he’s just speaking at a normal level and it’s Kokichi who is going deaf. “Looks like I was completely wrong about my first presumption of you. My bad.”

“...my bad?” Kokichi murmurs back. “That’s all you have to say?”

“A real man admits when he’s made a mistake,” Kaito responds. He runs a hand down his face with an exhausted huff. “Listen, I think things got a little out of hand-”

“Completely your fault by the way,” Kokichi adds.

Kaito frowns at him. “I didn’t, ah shit, I didn’t find you to lecture you, okay? I admit it, I did think that this conversation would go completely different and...” He sighs. “That’s on me. I just didn’t think that someone could be so...”

“...so?”

“Para...” Kaito nervously trails off as Kokichi narrows his eyes at him. “...noid?”

“I am not paranoid,” Kokichi snaps, flinching when the room starts to spin. He presses his fingernails into his palm to keep himself grounded. “And you know what? I have no clue how times I need to call you stupid for it to finally click for you. Are you seriously so-”

“Delusional?” Kaito finishes for him, raising a brow. “Yeah, you’ve called me that a couple times now.”

“Because it’s true,” Kokichi hisses. “Look, good for you that you don’t have to sleep with one eye open because for some godforsaken reason you actually feel safe in a place like this but, shit, did last night not teach you anything?”

“So what, you want me to doubt everyone just because...” Kaito pulls a face. “Someone like Gonta snapped and killed Angie? I can’t just start doubting everyone because of a crazy one off incident like that. Of course I’m devastated that he did such a thing in the first place but...”

Kokichi doesn't realise he's been staring unfocused at his lap until a cold hand presses against his forehead. He jolts away at the same time Kaito retracts his hand.

"Fucking hell, you're burning up!" Kaito shakes his head in disbelief. "Why didn't you mention you weren't feeling so good earlier?!"

"I'm fine," Kokichi lies quietly. He is not fine. His eyelids feel like weights, his bones feel like boulders and his mouth feels drier than a desert. "You know how it is after being stabbed."

"Uh, no? I don't?" Kaito stares at him. "I mean, I know losing a lot of blood makes you go all woozy but you should be doing a lot better than this. After all, a good night's sleep shoulda..." Kaito narrows his eyes. "...you did get some sleep, didn't you?"

"Are you telling me you managed to sleep after what happened yesterday?" Kokichi asks with a roll of his eyes. Well, it's not like Kaito has to deal with the fact his attacker is still alive and got away with murder. (Kaito also did not accidentally send someone innocent to their death too.)

"I mean..." Kaito guiltily looks away. "Okay, I didn't *actually* sleep as much as I made out I did with Tojo but after watching something so..." He clenches his fist. "So *brutal*, of course I couldn't get to sleep for a while."

Kokichi is pretty sure that the only reason he's awake right now is because of his stubborn refusal to sleep in case he sees Gonta in his dreams. Actually, scratch that. Kokichi knows he's never going to have a dream ever again. It's nightmares from here on out now.

"But still, you can't let yourself get in such a state in a situation like this," Kaito lectures him. "Because if something happens then how are you going to defend yourself?"

"Well it's been clearly established that I suck at defending myself," Kokichi says as he gestures to the thick wad of bandages padding his side. He smiles bitterly. "All in all, I guess I'll just die if push comes to shove."

He means it as a joke of course but Kaito clearly doesn't see the funny side of what he said. "How the hell can you joke about something like that?! Of course I'm not going to let you die!" He crosses his arms. "Listen, how about you focus on getting better and I'll look out for you in the meantime? After all, bros have to look out for each other now don't they?"

"When did we become bros?" Kokichi asks. "And aren't you being a little biased? Hoshi was practically begging us to let him die yesterday and you blew up at him, which wasn't cool by the way."

A flicker of guilt twinkles in Kaito's eyes. "Yeah...I said a lot of uncool things yesterday to him."

Kokichi massages his forehead with a frown. "Ugh, you better not go all sappy on me. I feel bad enough as it is and I don't need this conversation to turn into a disgusting heart to heart because I fear that will truly finish me off."

Kaito fails to hide a snort, hiding his smile behind a clenched fists. "Whoops. My bad."

"Honestly..." Kokichi grumbles, closing his eyes in an attempt to stop the room from swaying. It feels like he's been spun around for several hours.

"Listen, I think you need to get some sleep," Kaito says. "I'll ask Tojo to save you a plate of breakfast because you seriously look like you're about to keel over any second."

Kokichi waves a dismissive hand. “Uh, yeah, no thanks.”

“Ouma, stop being a stubborn brat for literally two minutes,” Kaito sighs. “You’re clearly exhausted and you need to sleep.”

“Sleep is for the weak,” Kokichi counters proudly.

“No, sleep is for smart people who know that they’ll pass out without it,” Kaito tells him. “And I ain’t catching you if you faint around me.”

“Ugh, don’t say faint,” Kokichi mumbles. “Sounds all...dramatic.”

“Ouma, you’re literally the definition of the word dramatic.”

“No you are,” Kokichi says before shaking his head. “No, actually you’re the definition of the word stupid.”

Kaito huffs. “Yeah, well, I can tell you’re not feeling well because that insult was pretty weak for your standards.”

“Rude!” Kokichi puts a hand to his chest. “You better prepare yourself because now I’m going to dedicate my entire life to thinking up new ways to bully you and that’s a promise.”

“Sounds scary,” Kaito says, sounding the exact opposite of scared. “Listen, just...get some sleep, okay? I ain’t leaving this room so nothing bad is going to happen to you if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“I’ve never worried about a thing in my life,” Kokichi responds.

Kaito sighs. “Whatever you say, Ouma.”

They glare at each other for what seems like eternity. Kokichi personally thinks it is very rude of Kaito to expect him to do as he says. He’s fine. He’s fine! Completely feeling super duper! He can sleep when he’s dead and it wouldn’t surprise him if Tsumugi or Monokuma find a way to assassinate him soon.

Kaito makes himself comfortable on the chair by his bed, taking his slippers off and resting his feet on the bed by Kokichi’s. Kokichi sneers at him as he purposefully shuffles away, even though his entire body from the waist down is under a blanket and therefore won’t even touch Kaito’s directly.

The astronaut soon proves he has the worst bedside manner in the world as he starts to have a full blown one sided conversation with himself. Honestly, Kokichi has no idea what the fuck Kaito is on about at any given point. Something about conquering the land and the sea and how he also wants to take over the sky or something. Good for him. Very ambitious though. Still, the idea that one day there might be a tiny flag with Kaito’s face on it plunged into the moon is very amusing.

Kokichi fails to pick up on Kaito’s cunning plan to bore him to sleep until it’s too late. At some point he must close his eyes for too long because he ends up asleep.

Kaito continues to ramble on in the background. (Maybe he’s talking so much on purpose.)

—

Gonta shows him around a room which has a big tree planted in the middle. The walls are full of

containers with different types of bugs and eggs inside. Gonta says that some of the bugs haven't hatched yet and that it's his job to look after them.

The room makes his skin crawl for several reasons. For starters, he hates bugs. However, something is stopping him from openly revealing his hatred for them. He's already let so many bad things happen to Gonta already so isn't the nicest thing to do for him is to suck it up and pretend that he loves bugs?

...wait, what? What happened to Gonta again? He can't remember.

He's rather fond of the more...pretty insects. He likes the butterflies and the ladybugs and even the grasshoppers aren't so bad. He refuses to go near any of the spiders, especially the tarantulas with thick, hairy legs. Gonta understands that some bugs can be scary so he mercifully steers them both away from the more creepy of crawlies.

When did he get here? He can't recall entering this room. It looks familiar but he can't remember how he knows this room. It's Gonta's room. Not his bedroom but this room certainly belongs to him because it's full of bugs.

Gonta smiles as he leads him over to a desk with a microscope and gestures for him to use it. "Gonta found new species of bug that he wants Ouma to see!"

Kokichi swallows before peering down at Gonta's latest discovery. It's a tiny black and white insect with huge wings. It almost looks like...

"Gonta has decided to call it the Nanokuma," Gonta says proudly as Kokichi continues to peer at it through the microscope. "Gonta thinks the Nanokuma might be his favourite new bug because it's always watching."

Nervously, Kokichi lifts his head up slowly and peers at Gonta. He struggles to see his face.

"Since it's always watching, it always knows the truth," Gonta continues in his warm voice that he reserves for talking about things he really likes. "Nanokuma know Gonta innocent so Gonta likes Nanokuma the best."

He tries to open his mouth, to say something. Anything. To tell Gonta that he's...he's sorry for not speaking up. That he's sorry for what happened to him. However, he can't speak no matter how hard he tries to force words out of his mouth. He can't speak at all.

"Gonta felt every sting of every bug that hurt him," Gonta says sadly. "Gonta no understand why he was hurt so badly by them because Gonta did nothing wrong! But Gonta forgives bugs because they don't know better. Bugs just trying to protect themselves." A butterfly flaps their wings nearby. "Maybe Ouma trying to do same. That why he didn't tell everyone truth. Gonta really not know who killed Angie but..."

Kokichi looks down and sees Angie lying by his feet, her glassy eyes looking up at him.

"It wasn't Gonta," Gonta tells him. "So why was Gonta punished for someone else's actions?"

There are hands on his shoulder. He spots slithers of blue hair tumble over his shoulders as a chin rests on his head.

"Why did Ouma vote wrong?" Gonta asks with a wavering voice.

It was an accident. He mis-clicked. He fully intended for the votes to be split. He just...he just

wanted to see who Monokuma would pick. He wanted to know if Monokuma would honour the rules or not.

He didn't. Monokuma *cheated*. The vote was wrong but Monokuma still decided to kill an innocent student. He broke his own rules.

"Why did Ouma gamble with Gonta's life?" Gonta presses, taking a step forward. "Ouma knew truth but still didn't help Gonta. Does he hate Gonta? Is that it?"

Kokichi shudders as an icy wind brushes against his skin. He looks around with wide eyes, watching as the bugs and tree slowly get swallowed up by white snow. He wraps his arms around himself, taking a step back. He stumbles into someone.

Miu's face turns purple as she claws at her neck frantically.

"Or did Ouma let Gonta die out of mercy?" Gonta's face twists into a grimace as he lifts up a roll of toilet paper. He lets it go and it flies away with the wind. "Gonta can't decide."

He opens his mouth to defend himself, to say that it's not his fault. It's Monokuma and Tsumugi who are cheating, who are breaking the rules just to force a game that shouldn't even be happening.

Still, he can't speak. He's not allowed to speak. He takes step after step backwards. His hair and scarf hit his face as the wind picks up. Gonta disappears in the snow. Miu vanishes completely. The back of his legs hit something, a fence he thinks. He loses his balance and topples backwards and falls and falls and falls and falls.

Then, he wakes up with a start, jolting up abruptly as his hands dig into his blanket tightly. Pain blossoms at his side and he winces, carefully lifting his blanket to check that he didn't just tear his stitches. Thankfully he hasn't and his bandage remains white.

He sighs and runs a hand through his hair, brushing the loose strands from his face. Yuck, he really needs to wash it soon. He hates feeling this gross and sweaty.

Kokichi ignores how his heart is currently trying to escape from his chest, beating so frantically that he wonders if it's trying to explode. Tch, all this over one bad nightmare. How pathetic.

He blinks when he hears the flush of a toilet and the squeak of a tap running water. He turns his attention to the door leading to the bathroom each bedroom has and watches as Kaito emerges from it a couple of moments later.

"Hey, what are you doing awake?" Kaito asks with a frown. "It's only been a couple of hours!"

"Not tired," Kokichi responds flatly, rubbing some sleep from his eyes. "What time is it?"

"Just a little past lunch time," Kaito answers before putting a hand on his hip. "Dude, you look even worse than before. How is that even possible?"

"Oh thanks," Kokichi sighs. He swallows. "Just what I wanted to hear."

"Shit, I, uh, didn't mean it like that," Kaito quickly backtracks, rubbing the back of his head. "So, uh, have you been awake long?"

"I just woke up," Kokichi says. Ugh, he really needs a drink. "Wait, have you been here the entire time?"

“I said I wouldn’t leave your side and I didn’t!” Kaito answers proudly.

Kokichi raises a brow. “Really?”

“Yeah, well, I left a couple of times to use the bathroom of course,” Kaito grumbles. “But aside from that, yeah, I’ve been here the entire time even though I really wanted to explore the school!”

“Hmm? What do you mean by that?”

“Well, uh, apparently Monokuma came by whilst everyone was eating breakfast,” Kaito explains as he crosses his arms. “Gave everyone a bunch of random shit apparently and told them that they could use certain things to unlock new areas of the school. According to Tojo, he told them he was feeling extra generous and gave them more items than he intended since there’s only nine of us so now we apparently somehow have two extra floors added to the school?”

“You’re telling me that Monokuma expanded the school by two floors overnight?” Kokichi asks slowly.

Kaito nods. “Yeah! Well, now that you put it that way it is kind of weird, isn’t it?”

“Did he say why he expanded the school?”

“Something about giving us labs to hone our talents or whatever,” Kaito says before pouting. “I haven’t gotten a lab yet though. Neither have you.”

“I don’t want one anyway,” Kokichi says with a scowl. “I don’t want shit from Monokuma.”

“Y-Yeah, same!” Kaito agrees a little too quickly. Obviously he wants a lab of his own. “Fuck that bear!”

Kokichi smiles weakly. “Yeah, fuck him.”

Kaito grins before his eyes go wide. “Oh yeah, Tojo set aside some breakfast for you and I was given strict instructions to make sure you eat everything! Or well, mostly everything.”

The astronaut picks up a tray from the coffee table and walks over to the bed with it. Kokichi’s stomach does several somersaults as Kaito reveals a bowl of fluffy white rice and a bowl of miso soup. He instead focuses on the cup of water that has also been left on the tray and picks that up, taking a couple of desperate sips and draining half of the cup in one go.

“Slow down!” Kaito scolds him as he lowers the cup back down onto the tray. “You’ll end up choking or some shit.”

“I think I know how to do the basic task of drinking water,” Kokichi reassures him. “And I don’t plan to be the first person in the world who manages to drown themselves in a cup of water.”

“Hey, it could happen,” Kaito tells him before licking his lips. “Also, Tojo’s food is the *best*! I know she’s the Ultimate Maid and all but she really should be the Ultimate Chef instead because seriously, everything she makes is like stuff you’d find in a five star restaurant or something!”

“Is that so?” Kokichi swallows before turning his head to the side. “Well, feel free to eat my breakfast because I’m not hungry.”

“Hah? How aren’t you starving?!” Kaito pulls a face. “My stomach goes all crazy when I miss even one meal. Also, breakfast is the most important meal of the day so I can’t just let you skip it!”

“Didn’t you say it’s lunch time?”

“Don’t be so awkward,” Kaito huffs.

“I…” Kokichi eyes the food. His stomach grumbles. Fuck. “I don’t like this.”

Kaito raises an eyebrow. “Are you lying?”

“No,” Kokichi answers a little too abruptly. He tsks. “I hate rice and I hate miso soup and I don’t want to eat anything Tojo makes anyway.”

“What? *Why?!?*” Kaito almost knocks the tray over in surprise.

“She might’ve meddled with the food,” Kokichi says seriously.

“You’re joking, right?” Kaito asks, face falling when he realises that Kokichi is in fact very serious. “Dude, your food is fine! She made one big pot of rice and another pot of soup. Everyone’s meals were made together so if she had meddled with the food then everyone would be ill, including Tojo herself.”

“She could’ve laced the bowls with something,” Kokichi says as he picks up his bowl of rice and inspects it closely. “She only needs to kill one person to leave, you know. Doesn’t matter whose bowl she laces, as long as one person dies then it doesn’t matter who she kills.”

“She hasn’t laced the bowls, okay?!” Kaito snatches the bowl from his hand. “Besides, there isn’t even anything she could lace them with anyway! I mean, yeah, she could’ve put cleaning products or something in the bowls but I’m pretty sure you’d taste if the food is off after a couple of bites.”

“It only takes a couple bites to put something into your system,” Kokichi points out through gritted teeth. “And once something deadly is in your system then it’s very hard to get it back out.”

Kaito gives him a hard look before grabbing a pair of chopsticks and plucks himself a very hearty amount of rice. He shoves the food into his own mouth before Kokichi can stop him. The leader watches incredulously as Kaito swallows the rice with a satisfied sigh before raising a brow at him. “Tastes okay to me.”

“Spit it out!”

“I’ve already swallowed it!” Kaito argues, lifting the bowl above his head as Kokichi tries to snatch it from his hands. “Ouma! Chill out for one second and look at me!”

Kokichi huffs and does as he’s told for once, crossing his arms as Kaito lowers the bowl again. The astronaut…looks fine. He isn’t suddenly turning blue and choking on the floor. (But still, sometimes it takes several minutes or even hours for something to take effect so-)

“I’m fine,” Kaito reassures him softly. “There’s seriously nothing wrong with this food. I promise.”

“...tch…” Kokichi narrows his eyes. “The only reason you’re not dying right now is because your brain is too stupid to realise that you’ve probably just poisoned yourself. Congratulations, spaceman. You’ve just killed yourself.”

“Well if I’ve just killed myself then I might as well finish the rest of the bowl,” Kaito sighs dramatically. Oh hell no, Kokichi isn’t doing this. He knows what Kaito is doing. The astronaut eats another small mouthful.

“You do you,” Kokichi huffs before his stomach growls loudly in protest. “And *you* can shut the fuck up.”

“Did you just tell your stomach to be quiet?” Kaito asks, sounding fairly amused.

“I’m the Ultimate Supreme Leader. I can and will tell anyone or anything to shut up,” Kokichi childishly argues.

Kaito rolls his eyes, deflating ever so slightly as he puts the bowl back onto the tray with a defeated sigh. Clearly he doesn’t want to eat too much since Kirumi will probably scold him if he does.

“Ouma, just eat the fucking food. Tojo didn’t mess with it, I promise.”

“Someone else might’ve-”

“It’s been here with me the entire time,” Kaito says. “Tojo has been the only other person who has had access to it-”

“Someone might’ve poisoned the bowls during the night-”

“We’re not allowed in the dining hall or kitchen during the night,” Kaito points out. “Have you not read the rules?”

“Well the rules don’t mean shit,” Kokichi snaps.

“And what’s that supposed to mean?” Kaito asks, clearly confused.

“...doesn’t matter,” Kokichi mumbles. He pushes the tray away from himself lightly. “Just...leave me alone.”

“No.” Kaito firmly plants his feet on the ground as he leans forward in his chair. “Like hell am I leaving you alone when you’re like this.”

“Like what?”

“Like...” Kaito grasps the air in frustration. “Look, something is *clearly* bothering you but you’re too stubborn to say what’s actually wrong with you. And yeah, I get it. I don’t like being in a killing game either but you can make things so much easier for yourself if you choose to believe in everyone, even if it’s just a tiny bit.”

“And what if I trust the wrong person, hmm?” Kokichi challenges. “What if someone stabs me in the back? Are you going to take responsibility for that?”

“Yeah, I am,” Kaito agrees much to Kokichi’s surprise. “If someone does betray you then you can tell me you told me so all you want.”

“Well obviously I can’t taunt you if I’m dead, Momota,” Kokichi points out.

“Who said anything about you dying?” Kaito asks. “When I said I’m going to take responsibility I meant it. I’ll keep an eye on ya from now on.”

“Wow, creepy much?”

“I’m being serious,” Kaito says. “Okay, so we don’t know each other that well but that doesn’t mean I’m going to let you die. Even you wouldn’t kill a stranger, right?”

An image of Gonta flashes in his mind.

Kokichi chews his lip.

“Ouma, I don’t plan to play this killing game at all,” Kaito tells him. “And I know you don’t believe me when I say that because, well, I haven’t gotten the chance to gain your trust yet. But trust is kinda a two way thing, you know? You’re gonna have to give a little to get a little.”

“I don’t have to trust anyone here,” Kokichi responds quietly. “And I don’t plan to either.”

“Then I’ll just prove to you that you can trust me,” Kaito says. “It doesn’t matter if it takes days or even years-”

“I’m not some little pet project,” Kokichi mumbles. “Quit using me as a god damn distraction-”

“I’m only trying to help because I believe in you,” Kaito reveals. “And...something is telling me that we’d make a good team.”

Kokichi almost snorts. “What, did you have a stupid little dream telling you that we’d work well together?”

“Sorta,” Kaito admits with a grim smile. “Besides, I’d like to get to know you better.”

“Why?”

“Because I never got the chance last time...” Kaito shakes his head. “I-I mean, I just do, okay?”

“...you’re relentless, you know that?” Kokichi sighs. “You’re seriously the type of guy who doesn’t take no for an answer, aren’t you?”

“What? Am I finally getting somewhere?” Kaito asks hopefully.

Kokichi scowls at him before huffing. He gestures for Kaito to pass the tray of food over. Kaito stares at him in surprise before quickly complying.

“If I die because I ate poisoned food then you’re taking full responsibility,” Kokichi grumbles before eating a mouthful of rice. It’s mouth wateringly delicious.

Kaito’s face lights up. “Y-Yeah, of course!”

“Stop sounding so pleased, I could die,” Kokichi sighs quietly, pretending that he’s not enjoying his food.

It tastes amazing.

(Spoiler, he doesn’t die.)

—

Kaito helps him sneak to his room for a shower when it starts to get late. Kirumi had seemed wary about letting him get his wound wet so had told him to wait until tomorrow so she could help him. Kokichi had complained at Kaito until the astronaut promised to help him find a way to clean himself.

He ends up ducking his head under the shower and washes his hair thoroughly. Afterwards, he washes his body with a sponge, taking care to actually make sure he doesn’t soak his bandages. His body trembles the entire time but he’s fairly certain that the short nap and the food he ate are the only reasons why he hasn’t face planted onto the floor yet.

He ties his hair back as he always does after a shower and finds a new set of clothes to put on. It's a little creepy how his wardrobe is full of the same outfit over and over again. He even has several pairs of shoes that are the exact same. Admittedly, his mood does improve after a good clean and a fresh uniform though. He leaves his bloodied clothing on his bed. Kirumi can deal with that later.

Whilst leaving his room he spots Kaito talking to Tenko of all people. He's mildly surprised that they're not actually arguing and instead having a civil conversation. Tenko is playing with one of her braids whilst Kaito talks to her animatedly.

He leans over the railings and watches them curiously, resting his chin in his hands.

"Oh and Tenko also got a lab of her own!" Tenko says. Hmm, he must've started listening in mid conversation. "Tenko is very frustrated that Monokuma has given her something so amazing because she doesn't want to thank him for her dojo."

"Who said anything about thanking him?" Kaito responds. "You don't have to thank him for shit."

Tenko pouts. "Tenko knows that but she's never been given something as extravagant as an entire dojo before! It makes Tenko feel like she owes Monokuma something! *Ugh!* Of course he finds a way to ruin everything! Now Tenko can't even use her dojo without feeling dirty."

"I wouldn't worry about things like that personally," Kaito reassures her. "After all, now you've got somewhere to practice your neo aikido! At least you know your aikido won't get rusty now."

"Tenko would never let herself get rusty at neo aikido!" Tenko growls. "She has been practicing every day in her bedroom! She may have, ah, broken some pieces of furniture in the process but that's not Tenko's fault!"

"Why not practice outside?" Kaito asks curiously. "There should be plenty of room for you out there."

"Hmm, Tenko isn't sure if she's comfortable training outside all alone," Tenko admits. "Tenko has been thinking of inviting some people to practice with her but Tenko isn't sure who she would actually want to do aikido with. Iruma doesn't seem like she would be interested and Tenko doesn't want to waste Tojo's time! Tenko supposes she could invite Shirogane but..."

"But?"

Tenko hesitates. "Tenko isn't sure. Shirogane told me she felt a little put off today that everyone suspected her yesterday so Tenko told her she'd use her extra special flipping technique to prove to everyone that she's a good person but she declined instantly!"

"Huh, you have a flipping technique?"

"Yep!" Tenko answers proudly. "Tenko has a way of reading her opponents by flipping them! It helps Tenko figure out her opponent's weaknesses as well as get a good read of them."

"Woah, could you flip me one day?" Kaito asks. He sounds like an excited kid.

Tenko blinks before nodding with a confident grin. "Of course! It'll be a double whammy since Tenko will be able to learn more about you too and get to know all of your weaknesses!"

"A-All of them?" Kaito wavers. "Actually, now that I think about it--"

"Nope! You asked Tenko for a flip so she's going to flip you the first chance she gets!" Tenko

pumps her fists.

Kaito pales but pretends that he's not just dug himself into a hole. "Ahaha, can't wait..."

"But still, Tenko can't figure out why Shirogane won't just let her give her one tiny flip!" Tenko sighs. "It won't hurt her at all! Tenko promised her that she would be extra careful and everything! Her dojo has mats that'll protect her too!"

"Yeah, it is kind of confusing," Kaito admits, rubbing his chin. "If I had the chance to instantly prove my innocence then I would take it."

Tenko grimaces, rubbing her arm. "Tenko...kind of regrets not using her technique on Gonta yesterday. S-She's not saying that she would've preferred that Shirogane was the culprit but Gonta...Tenko struggles to even imagine someone like him doing something so...horrible."

"If you flipped him and thought he was a good person then what would you have done?" Kaito asks. His expression slips into a more serious one.

"Tenko doesn't...really know," Tenko admits quietly. "Because if Tenko flipped Gonta and found out he was truly good then that would've left Shirogane as the culprit and she also doesn't look like the type of person who would do such a thing either."

"Yeah, it's tough," Kaito agrees. "But something about yesterday really...pisses me off, you know? Why did Gonta go after so many people in the first place? Even he must've known that only one person had to die for the time limit to end. Going after both Ouma and Shirogane...it just doesn't make any sense."

"Tenko feels the same way," Tenko confesses. "But Monokuma accepted Gonta as the culprit so that must mean he was the one who killed Angie, right?"

"Right..." Kaito pulls a face. "Gonta's actions were his own, no one else's. He must've had some reason why he did what he did. I just, fuck, it really pisses me off that he denied that he was the culprit right until the very end. At some point you just gotta take responsibility for your own actions. You get me, right?"

"It was very hard to listen to him...cry the entire time," Tenko says, pressing her fingers together. "Tenko knows what he did was horrible but she couldn't help but feel sorry for him. It was like he believed he really was innocent."

"It's just...that can't be right," Kaito murmurs before lifting his head up and giving Tenko a concerned look. "*Right?*"

"R-Right! Because if Monokuma wrongly punished Gonta then that would've meant he killed an innocent person," Tenko says. "And as much as Tenko hates that bear, Tenko would like to think that at least he'll follow his own rules."

"Yeah, yeah, that's right," Kaito agrees. There's something in his tone that suggests that he isn't fully confident however. "Monokuma might be a piece of shit but I'd like to think he takes the rules seriously at least."

Tenko hums in agreement. "And it really doesn't sit right with Tenko but...we all got to survive because of what Gonta did too. Of course Angie didn't deserve to die at all but...ugh, actually, Tenko's sorry. Forget what she just said! She feels disgusted that the only reason she's alive right now is because someone had to die for her!"

“Chabashira...” Kaito frowns.

Tenko’s voice sounds suspiciously thick. “Tenko *hates* that she might end up watching everyone die around her one by one! It’s not right at all! Life is such a precious thing and for Monokuma to turn the basic need to survive into a game for his own amusement...” Tenko’s hands shake. “It makes Tenko feel sick to her stomach!”

Kaito nods his head carefully. “Yeah, our situation is pretty fucked up.”

“Tenko refuses to ever harm another student here just so she can survive,” Tenko tells him firmly. “She’d rather die before ever resorting to murder!”

“Woah, hold on a second!” Kaito goes to put a hand on her shoulder but smartly backtracks.

“Chabashira, are you even listening to what you’re saying? You can’t deny yourself the right to live just because Monokuma is forcing us to do such fucked up shit! I get it, it bothers me too that the only reason I’m alive right now is because someone had to die but that doesn’t mean I’m gonna let Angie’s or Gonta’s deaths be in vain!”

“Tenko doesn’t want to die but she’d rather die than harm another person here!” Tenko argues. “A- And Tenko hates the fact that Angie’s murder is probably not going to be the last one! Monokuma already put us through hell with the time limit motive and Tenko isn’t dumb enough to think he doesn’t have anything else planned! What if he tells us tomorrow that we only have six hours to show him another body?! What if he threatens our family and friends?”

“We can only deal with problems that exist,” Kaito tells her. “So until then, we should be grateful that Monokuma at least has given us today to recover from the events of yesterday.”

“But, ugh, he taunts us every chance he gets!” Tenko growls. “It’s almost as if he wants Tenko to punch his stupid smirk off his face!”

“God, I want to punch him so hard too,” Kaito admits, barely suppressing a snort. “I’d do almost anything for the chance to land one solid punch on him.”

“Tenko would marry a male just for the chance to hit him,” Tenko reveals.

“Isn’t that...typically what, you know, women do anyway? Marry men?” Kaito asks in confusion.

Tenko sneers at him. “You poor, naïve, fool.”

“W-What? What did I say?!”

“Next time Momota gets a girlfriend, Tenko is going to steal her just to teach you a lesson,” Tenko declares.

“What? *Why?!?*” Kaito looks devastated. “It’s not like you would be able to date her anyway!”

Tenko immediately starts to emit a disapproving aura. “Tenko senses that Momota is another level of dumb.”

“Seriously, what did I say?!”

Tenko rolls her eyes but there’s a trace of an amused smile on her face that she’s desperately trying to hide. “Forget it. If Momota isn’t able to put two and two together now then Tenko doubts he ever will.”

“Is this about you stealing my metaphorical girlfriend?!” Kaito asks desperately. “Because you can be friends with her! I bet the two of you will have a friendship that’ll go down in history!”

“That’s...” Tenko shakes her head. “Really, just forget it. Tenko doesn’t want to laugh at something a male said so...”

Kaito pouts before scratching the side of his head. “Hey, what were we on about earlier? I feel like our conversation got completely derailed.”

“Punching Monokuma?”

“No, before that,” Kaito says before frowns. “Oh yeah...”

Tenko clears her throat uncomfortably. “Maybe we should just put an end to that conversation. Tenko *really* doesn’t want to think about it anymore.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Kaito sighs. “No point reopening old wounds...wait, wounds...oh shit!”

“What?”

“I promised Ouma I’d guard his bedroom door whilst he showered,” Kaito explains. “I-I mean I never technically left the dormitory so-”

“Momota, I finished my shower ages ago,” Kokichi calls from the balcony, deciding that now would be the perfect time to insert himself into the conversation. He flutters his fingers as a greeting. “Hiya, Chabashira!”

“O-Ouma...” Tenko’s expression turns uneasy.

Kokichi pouts. He literally hasn’t even done anything yet Tenko seems uncomfortable at the mere sight of him. “Hah? What did I do?”

Kaito shrugs helplessly. Thanks for the help, spaceman.

Tenko chews on her bottom lip before clearing her throat. “Tenko, um, actually has something she wants to say to you, Ouma. About yesterday. Um...”

“Huh, what happened yesterday?” Kaito asks curiously.

“Yeah, what happened yesterday?” Kokichi tilts his head. Literally nothing is springing to mind.

“Do...you not remember?” Tenko asks with wide eyes. “Tenko told you that she wished you would disappear!”

“Oh, yeah, that,” Kokichi says with a raised brow. “And? What about it?”

Tenko seems caught off guard by his nonchalant response. “Well, it was extremely wrong of Tenko to say such a thing to you. A-And it’s not because you’re a male. Tenko knows she has a reputation for being especially mean to guys but...” She fiddles with her sleeves absentmindedly. “Tenko doesn’t actually want you to disappear. O-Or anyone else either! She was really stressed and you were saying really stupid things and she just snapped! Tenko is sorry, okay?”

Huh. It seems like her little outburst is bothering her a lot more than it should. Kokichi can barely even remember the conversation happening. He shrugs. “Okay then.”

“Eh? Aren’t you...angry at Tenko?” Tenko asks. “Especially because of what happened to you

yesterday! Tenko truly doesn't want you to actually die."

"Yeah, okay. Thanks, I guess," Kokichi says.

"Ouma, don't you think you're being a little bit dismissive?" Kaito prompts with an expectant look on his face. Oh, he wants him to reassure Tenko that he's not actually angry.

"I can't even remember talking to Chabashira yesterday," Kokichi admits lazily.

"Really?" Tenko tilts her head. "But..."

"And I don't really accept apologies from people who are only trying to comfort themselves," Kokichi adds with a dramatic sigh. "So..."

"T-Tenko isn't trying to comfort herself!" Tenko snaps. "Tenko truly is sorry-"

"Tell you what, I'll accept your apology if you tell me the truth," Kokichi compromises. "Because there must've been some sort of truth behind your words, right? You wouldn't say something so mean to someone for no reason, riiight?"

Tenko frowns. "Well...Tenko only said what she said because you were being so annoying and dismissive! You were making fun of Tojo and Tenko when there wasn't much time left before the time limit was up! She said the first thing that popped into her head and it ended up being something...really awful." She wrings her hands anxiously. "A-And Tenko will admit it, she *did* want you to disappear at that very moment but she didn't actually want you to die! So when Tenko saw that you'd been stabbed it just...kinda hit her that one of the last things she would've said to you was that she wanted you to disappear and...the reality of how messed up this situation is, it really just..."

"C'mon, Ouma. Can't you see that she's sorry?" Kaito says.

Ugh, he wasn't actually expecting a full on emotional confession. He was hoping she'd just get mad at him and storm off but no, she decides to shatter his expectations and be the better person. He's great at pushing people's buttons but heartfelt banter like this? Ew.

(Besides, it would've made him feel better if she told him that she did want him to disappear because that's something he can easily agree with. He doesn't deserve whatever the hell this is. Kindness?)

"Yep, I can totally see it now," Kokichi responds, nodding his head a little too quickly. "Okay, apology accepted or whatever. Now, if you don't mind-"

"What's going on here?"

Kirumi enters the dormitory with a basket pressed to her hip. She raises an eyebrow delicately. Kaito's expression turns sheepish whilst Kokichi isn't sure if he's grateful for the interruption or not.

"You should be resting," Kirumi says to Kokichi before turning to Kaito. "And I thought you were watching him?"

"He wanted to shower!" Kaito blurts out. Wow. So much for loyalty.

"I felt all yucky!" Kokichi argues. "Besides, look at me! Does it look like I ruined the bandaging?"

Kirumi sighs. "You shouldn't be pushing yourself. Ouma, your wound is a lot more serious than you think it actually is and you shouldn't be wasting your energy so freely."

"Fine, fine, I'll go back to bed!" Kokichi holds his hands up in surrender. "No need to turn this into a three hour lecture."

"Are you staying in my room again or are you staying in yours tonight?" Kirumi asks. "I would like to once again watch over you just in case--"

"Well if you're so hellbent on staring at me all night then again then I'm staying in your room," Kokichi says. His room is still something he wants to keep private at all cost.

Kaito doesn't look pleased. "Tojo, you said you didn't get any sleep last night. I don't think you're in any state to do another all nighter."

"Momota, I can assure you that I really do know what my limits are--"

"Tenko agrees with him," Tenko says. "Tojo, why didn't you mention earlier that you haven't had any sleep?! Tenko would've helped you out a lot more around the school if she had known!"

"Both of you, please stop causing such a fuss--"

"Nah, I've already decided!" Kaito suddenly says. "Ouma, you're staying with me tonight. Chabashira, you're with Tojo!"

Kirumi blinks. "But--"

"Tenko likes this arrangement, although she doesn't like Momota telling her what to do," Tenko grumbles. "C'mon Tojo, we can turn it into a sleepover! With *extra* sleeping and resting!"

"But I really should..." Kirumi hesitates, pulling a face.

"Tojo, I've had plenty of medical training if something bad happens," Kaito reassures her. "Can't go into space without knowing how to look after myself and others after all!"

"But even so--"

"Do I even get a say in this?" Kokichi asks.

"Nope!" Kaito answers cheerfully. "C'mon, bro. I'll even let you have my bed this time!"

Kaito ushers him into his room before Kirumi can argue anymore. Kokichi notices Tenko do the same to Kirumi, although the maid doesn't look pleased at being mollicoddled. Kokichi wonders if he's ever going to get to sleep in his own bed at all.

Kaito basically bullies him into bed, which is very mean of him. Kokichi is going to make some complaints about him later to...someone.

"Y'know, maybe Chabashira isn't as scary as I thought she was," Kaito suddenly says from the couch. He has his hands resting behind his head. "She's actually really nice!"

"What? Do you have a crush on her or something?" Kokichi asks.

"Huh? N-No!" Kaito flushes. "Of course not! I mean, she's pretty and she'd make a good exercising partner but we'd never work! Besides, she's not even my type anyway."

“Oh? Momota has a type, does he?” It comes out a little more teasingly than he wanted.

“Yeah? Don’t all guys have a certain type they like?”

“I dunno,” Kokichi says.

Kaito goes silent for a moment and Kokichi wonders if he’s somehow managed to fall asleep.

“Hey, why were you so...well, strict with Chabashira earlier?”

“Hmm? What do you mean?”

“Well you wouldn’t accept her apology even though she went out of her way to apologise to you,” Kaito says. “It takes a lot of guts to do something like that, you know?”

“Because people who apologise to make themselves feel better are the worst!” Kokichi responds.

“Ouma, I do think she was being genuine,” Kaito tells him. “I don’t know what you said to make her snap at you but she obviously regrets it.”

“And I seriously don’t care if she wants to me disappear or not,” Kokichi says.

“Really?” Kaito hums. “You should have more respect for yourself, man.”

“Of course I have plenty of respect for myself,” Kokichi grumbles. “I’m the most respected person on the planet!”

“Psh, yeah, and I’m the president of space,” Kaito responds with a snort.

Kokichi huffs as he readjusts the blankets over him. “Only someone pathetic would let themselves be bothered by words. Because that’s what they are, just words. If I broke down every time someone insulted me then I’d never get anything done.”

“Yeah but still...” Kaito shuffles to get comfortable on the couch. “I thought you of all people would care about how people think about you. Isn’t that the sort of thing leaders care about? Their image?”

“A bad leader would obsess over their image,” Kokichi tells him. “A good one doesn’t give a shit.”

“You know it’s okay to, you know, give a shit about yourself?” Kaito says. “Everyone deserves love and compassion.”

“Is that so?” Kokichi imagines Gonta and even Angie would say otherwise.

Like he cares. The sooner Kaito stops spouting shit, the better. Soon enough the astronaut will exhaust himself and stop talking about things he clearly doesn’t understand.

Kaito doesn’t say anything for a while and Kokichi is certain that this time for sure he’s fallen asleep. Once again, he’s quickly proved wrong yet again as Kaito says something that catches him off guard.

“Let’s train tomorrow. You, me, Chabashira and Hoshi.”

“Huh?” Did Kaito forget that Kirumi will probably assassinate him if he gets out of bed one more time? And what’s with the weird choice of people?

“Usually I train every night as a part of my astronaut training and I don’t want to start slacking,”

Kaito says. “And I think all of you would be my perfect training partners!”

“You do remember I’m hurt, right?”

“We can do some mental training too,” Kaito easily says. “Besides, I’ve already decided that I’m gonna get you all to join me outside tomorrow.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, I think it would do us all some good,” Kaito explains. “Chabashira is already looking for people to train with anyway and I need to talk to Hoshi about something too.”

“That doesn’t explain why you want *me* there.”

“Because, you need to be there.” Kaito’s flimsy answer isn’t the most inspiring. “And I’m not taking no for an answer!”

“Yeah but I think I’m scheduled to be extremely sick tomorrow so I don’t think I can make it,” Kokichi says sadly.

Kaito chuckles. “Yeah, yeah, whatever you say.”

Kokichi stares holes into the couch Kaito is lying on. He can’t see him at the angle he’s sat at but he hopes Kaito is at least smart enough to figure out that he does not like his plan at all.

He finally figures out the astronaut has fallen asleep when he starts snoring loudly. Kokichi sighs and lies on Kaito’s bed quietly, hands resting on his stomach as he stares up at the ceiling.

Gonta's shadowy figure watches him from the corner of his eye. Kokichi doesn’t get much sleep.

Kokichi Ouma - Chapter 2 Part 2

Chapter Notes

Initially I struggled to get this chapter started and it ended up being on the longer side lmao. Honestly it was a huge struggle to make sure I wasn't writing anyone out of character, Kokichi especially. He certainly is someone very tricky to write ahaha.

Thanks to anyone who left a comment on the previous chapter, they do mean a lot and are a big source of inspiration ahaha. I'm hoping the next chapter doesn't take too long to write since I think this chapter helps set up the next one. We'll have to wait and see.

Thanks for reading and I hope you all enjoy my writing! Have a nice day!

Kokichi escapes Kaito's bedroom during the early hours of the morning. It wasn't too much of a hassle, all he had to do was pick the astronaut's lock with a hairpin and hightail it out of the dormitory before Kirumi's sixth sense for trouble was triggered.

He has a little bit of a wander, keeping a hand pressed to his side carefully as he explores the new areas of the school with intrigue. Nothing really catches his attention. All Monokuma did was add a couple more floors and give some people a room that they could practice their talent in.

There's also a new area for him to explore outside. He steps into an open space that is coated with stars and has two large buildings sprouting from the ground. One building is a hotel, specifically a love hotel. Kokichi raises a brow at it before quickly walking away before he catches some sort of disease. The other building is a casino, which is decorated rather luxuriously. He runs a hand down some golden railings belonging to a very large staircase as he heads down some stairs, pausing when he hears a jingle play from one of the many slot machines spread out in front of him.

He spies Ryoma of all people watching a machine with dull eyes, a very large pile of coins by his feet. Kokichi stares as even more coins tumble to the floor. He must've gotten a very good row of pictures.

It's almost a pitiful sight as Ryoma ignores the coins and pulls on the machine's lever once more, eyes flickering up to look at the pictures whiz dizzyingly fast on the screen above his head. Kokichi takes a step closer and watches curiously as Ryoma once again wins a boastful amount of coins. Upon closer inspection, Kokichi spots that all the coins have a picture of Monokuma printed onto them. Yuck.

Ryoma must've sensed that he was there since the tennis player checks over his shoulder briefly before taking a heavy bite of his sweet cigarette. He looks like he's deep in thought for a second before turning away again, tugging on the lever beside him once more.

"A penny for your thoughts?" Kokichi asks as he jokingly picks up one of the Monokuma coins and rolls it around his palm. He takes a seat on the stool next to Ryoma, flinching when he moves a little too abruptly. He swings his legs slowly as he watches the slot machine sing out another win.

Ryoma doesn't answer him at first, clearly content with just gambling away his impressive stack of coins. It's a spectacular sight to see him win coin after coin. "What are you doing up? Tojo said

you needed to rest.”

“Well I’m better now, *duh*,” Kokichi responds with a roll of his eyes.

“Clearly,” Ryoma grumbles, scowling when he somehow manages to win again. He ups the stakes by pressing even more coins into the machine. “What are you doing down here, kid? Didn’t expect anyone else to be awake so early in the morning.”

“All I’ve done is sleep all day!” Kokichi whines as he spins around on the chair. “And lying in bed with absolutely nothing to do gets totally boring after a while so I decided to escape and have a little look-see around the school.”

“And did you purposefully wait until everyone was asleep to leave?” Ryoma raises a brow.

Kokichi smiles. “Maybe.”

Ryoma looks him up and down with an unimpressed look before sighing. “Whatever, it’s not like I’m your caretaker anyway.”

“Geez, someone clearly woke up on the wrong side of the bed,” Kokichi grumbles with a pout. He pretends he’s not impressed as Ryoma, once again, wins an unspeakable amount of coins. “Did you rig the machine or something?”

“Done nothing but win since I started,” Ryoma admits flatly. “Starting to think that this machine might be broken or something.”

“Or maybe you’re just really lucky?” Kokichi suggests. He holds his hands up when Ryoma scowls at him. “What’s with the sour look? It’s not like I said something completely unreasonable!”

“If I was lucky then I would be a completely different person right now,” Ryoma responds with a jerky tug of the lever. “And I doubt I’d be stuck in a sick game like this too.”

“Maybe your luck just works in cycles.” Kokichi rolls the coin he picked up along his knuckles. “Maybe it just likes to balance itself out, you know? One day you might be suuuper lucky and the next day you might have the worst luck in the entire world!”

Ryoma wrinkles his nose. “I doubt that, kid.”

“I’m just saying,” Kokichi says as he gestures to the very large pile of coins on the floor. “This sort of luck is not normal.”

The tennis player sighs loudly, turning to face Kokichi with a frown. He lets go of the lever. “Kid, do you want something? I came down here to be alone.”

“What, do you own the casino or something?” Kokichi asks. “Because it’s not like you can kick me out of here. Unfortunately for you I’ve decided that this stool is extremely comfortable so I might just sit here forever and ever and ever.”

“Is that so?” Ryoma hops down from his own stool and wanders over to a new machine.

“Hey!” Kokichi puffs his cheeks out as he follows the tennis player, albeit rather slowly for obvious reasons. He pants as he drags himself onto a new stool that is obnoxiously close to Ryoma. “How rude! I thought we were having a very pleasant conversation! You can’t just walk away like that!”

Ryoma's eyes remind him of ones belonging to a dead fish. "Can't you take a hint? Leave me alone."

"But I'm bored!" Kokichi drapes himself dramatically over the top of one of the slot machines. "And you're the only person awake who can entertain me so it's your sole job to make sure I'm amused for the next twenty four hours or I'll make sure that every person in the world will know how big of an asshole you are!"

"Twenty four hours?" Ryoma tugs on his hat. "Keeping you entertained for that long is worse than dealing with a death sentence."

"What's it with people here thinking they can bully me without a care?" Kokichi wipes a fake tear from his eye. "I'm the most influential person on the planet! I'm the reason why successful people are successful and poor people are poor! No one understands the absolute power I hold in my hands!"

"If you're so powerful then why haven't you gotten Monokuma to stop the killing game?" Ryoma asks with a raised brow. "Since you talk such a big game then getting him to put an end to all this madness should be easy, right?"

"Well that would be boring and I *hate* anything that is boring," Kokichi insists, resting his arm on his forehead. The dim lighting of the casino makes it so that he isn't instantly blinded when he somehow manages to roll onto his back, the plastic buttons of the slot machine digging into his back. It's a miracle his chair hasn't tipped over yet and thrown him onto the floor. "But if you're getting too bored then feel free to give suggestions to Monokuma to help him spice the game up a little. I personally thought the time limit he gave us was very cliché and forced."

"Of course I don't have any suggestions," Ryoma says with a deep frown. "I might not care what happens to me but I do give a damn about everyone else surviving. Young people shouldn't be forced to kill each other for such a twisted reason. Hell, there is no real justification for wanting people to kill each other in the first place."

"Woah, I don't think I've ever heard you say so much in one go," Kokichi comments. He catches a button with his back and the machine he's lying on buzzes in protest. "But if what you're saying is true then what are you still doing here?"

Ryoma pauses. "What do you mean?"

"Well you had every opportunity to, you know..." Kokichi drags a finger along his neck in a crude gesture, making a sound with his tongue as his head flops. "Yet you're still alive so..."

"Kid, you were literally the one who told me not to kill myself," Ryoma argues with an agitated stare. "The only reason why I forced myself to stay alive was because I didn't want to be the one to start the killing game."

"Oh, so were you hoping for someone else to start the killing game then?"

Ryoma glares at him darkly. "Don't twist my words, Ouma. You and I both know I would've died in a heartbeat if it meant giving you all a little more time to escape."

"But you didn't die and now you have to deal with all of the yucky consequences," Kokichi points out. "Wow, I wonder what Angie and Gonta would say if they could see you now. They both died to keep us alive and you're wasting your time gambling. I *totally* don't feel like their deaths were a waste."

“Are you purposefully trying to get under my skin?” Ryoma asks. His hand wavers over the new pile of coins he’s won. “I wasn’t the one who told Gonta to kill Angie. Only Gonta alone is responsible for making Angie’s life a waste, not me.”

“So now you’re saying Angie’s life up until now was a waste?” Kokichi pulls a face. “A little harsh, don’t you think?”

“That’s not what I...” Ryoma stares down at the floor in frustration. He closes his eyes before taking a deep breath. It doesn’t help ease any of the tension in his body. “*No one* should’ve been sacrificed. The only person who should’ve died that day was me and yet here I am. Alive when I don’t even have a single reason to live for.”

“Well of course you have a reason to live!” Kokichi turns to face him with a sickly sweet smile. “If you die then that means we’ll have to hold a class trial for you and then everyone else might die trying to figure out your cause of death!”

“Is...that all you care about?” Ryoma asks quietly. Maybe Kokichi managed to strike a nerve since Ryoma suddenly deflates, his small hands dropping into his lap as he stares at the slot machine in defeat. “Can’t promise that figuring out my cause of death won’t be a hassle but I do promise that when I do die then I’ll try to make sure that cause of death is somewhat easy to figure out.”

“Oh? Are you going to write a very detailed note about who your killer is and how they killed you?” Kokichi asks.

“Something like that maybe,” Ryoma answers.

“Nuh-uh, wrong answer!” Kokichi clenches his fists childishly. “That would be boring! Dying such a boring death has to be one of the worst ways to die ever! When I die I want my death to cause so much drama that I’ll go down in history as the most dramatic death ever!”

“You...really are one strange kid, aren’t you?” Ryoma sighs. “But you should honestly stop talking about things you really don’t have a clue about.”

“Hmm? What do you mean?”

“You talk about death as if...dying doesn’t even matter,” Ryoma says. “Honestly, it’s hard to tell if you’re trying to cover up your own feelings or if you’re just being plain disrespectful.”

“Always assume it’s the second choice,” Kokichi tells him. “Because I have absolutely nothing to hide and I am prone to being very disrespectful twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. It’s practically my full time job.”

“I’d be more inclined to believe you if you hadn’t purposefully stopped me in the warehouse the other day,” Ryoma admits. He pulls out a small sweet box from his pocket and fumbles with the edges to pull out a new sweet. “Hell, you even spared Gonta from dealing with me for any longer too.”

“*No*, Tojo genuinely wanted to see him,” Kokichi insists.

“Bullshit, a lot of things that come out of your mouths are lies so don’t think I’m going to start believing that you’ve suddenly taken an oath to only tell the truth from here on out,” Ryoma says. “Everyone had the perfect opportunity to survive the time limit without having to also endure watching Monokuma torture someone to death yet you still talked me down.”

“But watching Gonta be...” Kokichi blinks. He’d spent the little time he was down in the trial

room during Gonta's death staring at Tsumugi. "Tortured was so *fun*."

"Kid, you literally left before Gonta even died," Ryoma says. "So you can stop with the lying."

"I had to go and pee," Kokichi protests.

"Even if that is true, you still left when no one else did," Ryoma responds.

Kokichi rolls his eyes. "So what if I did? Are you going to lecture me too, huh? Say it was my responsibility as a decent human being to watch Gonta die out of respect? The most respectful thing was to not watch him go through something so embarrassing. Did you see how red his face was when he was dragged out of the room? I would've been mortified if that was me!"

Ryoma grimaces, shaking his head. "I just...wish I knew why the kid did what he did. Didn't think someone like him would do something so...inhumane. Killing Angie is one thing but to hurt both you and Shirogane too? It just doesn't sit right with me."

"Who knows. Stress can cause people to do strange things," Kokichi says. "Maybe he thought he was doing everyone a favour by killing us all? I mean, the only thing worse than participating in a killing game is living long enough to become a victim or killer."

"No offence to Gonta but...someone like him wouldn't have thought that far ahead," Ryoma says slowly. "The kid was nice but he wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed now was he? And for him to stay with me long enough to make sure I didn't actually kill myself, well, something just doesn't add up."

"Oh? So you think Monokuma punished the wrong person?" Kokichi asks.

Ryoma hesitates before shaking his head dismissively. "Honestly, I'm not sure what I believe anymore. I know Monokuma is cruel but I can't imagine him killing the wrong person on purpose. I'd like to think that he at least gives a damn about his own rules."

"Maybe Hoshi should stop worrying about things that don't even matter anymore anyway?" Kokichi suggests.

"It's just..." Ryoma's shoulders go tense as he crunches down on yet another sweet cigarette. "Can't help but think Gonta only did what he did because of me."

Kokichi blinks in surprise before giggling. "I think you're giving yourself way too much credit. The world doesn't revolve around you, you know? I doubt Gonta was even thinking about you when he ever so kindly shoved a knife into my gut."

"The kid was fine before he saw me in the warehouse, had a smile on his face and everything," Ryoma tells him. He scoffs. "You should've seen his face when he realised I was tying a noose, it was like he was a kid and discovered Santa wasn't real. Never seen someone start to cry so quick before."

"Hoshi, you heartless monster!"

Ryoma shuffles uncomfortably on his seat. "He just kept going on and on about how I wasn't allowed to die. Well, not only me but everyone else too. I honestly thought he truly believed he could take down Monokuma with his bare hands. It makes me feel irritated that Momota filled his head with the idea that they could beat Monokuma so easily." He sighs. "He kept telling me that things would get better and I know he was only trying to comfort me but Gonta really had no idea what sort of life I lived before coming here. I don't think it ever clicked with him that I'm not

going to get to live any sort of life even if I do leave.”

“And did Hoshi tell that to Gonta?”

“Several times but Gonta just wouldn't listen,” Ryoma says. “It just doesn't make sense how he wouldn't let me die but...killed Angie and tried to kill other people too. If it was anyone else but Gonta then I would've believed that they might've snapped under stress but Gonta? Man, I sure do have a ways to go when it comes to reading people. Honestly, I thought the kid wouldn't even hurt a fly.”

“Well he sure hurt a lot of people,” Kokichi responds. “Maybe he was on some secret agenda to rid the world of people so there can be a bug uprising.”

“How can you joke around so easily?” Ryoma suddenly asks. “What happened with Gonta...it wasn't right. It wasn't humane. This game isn't humane. How are you so...casual about everything?”

“Would you prefer it if I had a breakdown instead?” Kokichi counters. “Besides, the sooner you accept that we're in this game for the long run then the easier it is to embrace playing it. I mean, the game has officially started now so there's no turning back. You might as well have as much fun as you can before you're inevitably murdered by someone.”

“What part of this game is fun to you?” Ryoma asks incredulously. “Murder isn't a game, Ouma. The fact that everyone here has to second guess every decision they make is pure hell.”

“Then don't overthink things, duh,” Kokichi says with a roll of his eyes. “Only an idiot would show that they're paranoid.”

Ryoma pulls a face. “I swear I overheard Tojo muttering to herself about how you were convinced she was going to poison your food during breakfast.”

“Oh. That? I was just proving a point to her. In fact, I was helping everyone out in the long run if you think about it,” Kokichi says. “Now that she knows that I'm onto her about her cooking there's no way she's going to try and kill us all now with dodgy food so you should be thanking me for keeping your food safe.”

“You actually really upset her.”

“We're in a killing game. Do you really think I have time to worry about such frivolous things?” Kokichi says. “Level with me for a second. You've been to prison, right? Can you wholeheartedly say you went out of your way to make friends whilst you were there?”

“Well...” Ryoma clears his throat uncomfortably. “Have to admit that I didn't.”

“See!” Kokichi crosses his arms in satisfaction.

“Didn't mean I also went out of my way to antagonise people,” Ryoma adds. “Just kept my head down and hoped no one brought trouble my way.”

“I'm the Ultimate Supreme Leader of Evil, of course I'm going to cause trouble wherever I go!” Kokichi announces. “In fact, I'm actually angry that Monokuma came up with the premise of a killing game before me! When I get out of here I'm totally going to force all of my enemies into a game like this for fun!”

“If you get out of here,” Ryoma tells him. “And if you keep saying the same shit you're saying to

me to everyone else then you're going to end up with a target on your back. People don't tend to treat outsiders well, you know?"

"Bah, like I have to worry about that in a game like this," Kokichi says dismissively. "Everyone is so desperate to get along that I'll just get constantly scolded by everyone at best and I'd like to see someone try to even kill me."

"Says the person with the stab wound," Ryoma says bluntly.

"Oh, but did it kill me?"

"You're only alive because Tojo looked after you," Ryoma responds. "The least you could do is ease off on her just a little. Things are already stressful enough as it is. Everyone doesn't need you acting out on top of Monokuma watching over us like a hawk."

"I'm only trying to liven things up around here," Kokichi says with a small snuffle. "I wasn't warned that things would be so boring in between killings. Aw man, I hope Monokuma gives us a motive soon! That'll certainly ruffle a couple feathers!"

"If you must know he said he was going to give us another motive in the morning," Ryoma tells him with a vexed scowl.

"Yippee! I can't wait!"

"You're..." Ryoma struggles to think of the right word. "Unbelievable, you know that? Even if you are joking then everything you're saying is in poor taste."

"Well excuse me for trying to make the most out of this situation," Kokichi grumbles childishly. "At least I'm going to have no regrets when playing this game because I'll know I would've tried my best to have as much fun as possible!"

"There's nothing fun about..." Ryoma pinches the bridge of his nose. "You know what, forget it. Talking to you is like going around in circles."

"Aw, is Hoshi going to ignore me now?"

Ryoma grunts as he turns back to his slot machine, shoving an eye widening amount of coins into it and pulling on the level a little too harshly. He barely wins enough to make up for the large sum of coins he just deposited but Ryoma doesn't seem to care.

Kokichi pouts and rolls onto his side. "How mean, pretending like I'm not even here..."

Funnily enough, Ryoma doesn't respond.

"Oh well, I guess I'll just have to have a super awesome conversation with myself then," Kokichi says with a dramatic sigh. "You're missing out! I'll have you know that I'm an excellent conversationalist. Every person always leaves me a five star rating after talking with me!"

Ryoma snorts humourlessly. "Yeah, sure kid."

"It's true!" Kokichi insists.

"Tell you what kid, people are more likely to believe what you're saying if you don't alternate between lying and telling the truth every time you open your mouth," Ryoma says. "Don't know if that's some sort of habit of yours but you're going to end up as the boy who cried wolf if you keep

at it.”

“Ooh, how scary!” Kokichi pretends to tremble. “I guess I’ll just have to end every sentence I say with ‘apparently’ or ‘seemingly’ so that way no one can legally say that I’m lying!”

“I’d hate to be your lawyer,” Ryoma says.

“Oh don’t worry, they get paid a lot,” Kokichi reassures him. “I make their job worthwhile by making sure they are constantly stocked up on grape juice.” He pauses. “To give to me, of course. To keep me sweet so that I don’t fire them if they start slacking.”

“Sounds like you’re a very fair boss then,” Ryoma says. “Let me guess, you have a zero percent employee dropout rate?”

“Yep! I’ve never had a single person leave my organisation through free will!” Kokichi says.

“Why would you want to leave when you get the absolute privilege of having me as your boss? Besides, everyone who joins has to sign a contract that states that if they even try to leave then I’ll ship them off to a remote island where they have to count each individual grain of sand until they know how much there is on the island! They can only come back if they say the right number.”

“Uh huh, sure.”

“No one has managed to say the right number yet,” Kokichi admits as he checks his fingernails.

“But between you and me, not even I know the exact number. All they have to do is say a ridiculously silly number like sixty nine and I’ll wholeheartedly believe them because I like a worker with a good sense of humour.”

“Ah yes, because it’s more likely for there to be sixty nine grains of sand on an island to let’s say a million.”

“Exactly! You get it!” Kokichi nods his head happily. “If only Hoshi-chan didn’t have such a terrible criminal record. I’d hire you straight away to be my manager if I thought you wouldn’t bonk me over the head with a tennis ball during my sleep!”

Ryoma runs a hand down his face. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome!” Kokichi grimaces as he manages to catch several buttons at once with his back. The machine protests loudly underneath him. “Sheesh, these things are annoying.”

“I don’t think they’re designed to be laid on,” Ryoma tells him. “Well, it’s just a hunch really.”

“Oh haha, I didn’t know you were such a comedian.”

“And I didn’t know your standard for humour is so low.”

Kokichi pokes his tongue out at him. “Just for that I’m going to ask the prison you were in before to transfer you to my remote island and I will *not* accept the funny number as the right answer so you will have to actually count all the sand.”

“As if you have that sort of authority.”

“I totally do! I secretly run every single organisation there is, you know?” Kokichi puts a finger to his lips. “I’m practically besties with the mafia too. One call to them and they’ll do whatever I tell them to do!”

A frown starts to twitch on Ryoma's face. "Whatever you say, kid."

"Sheesh, you're so pessimistic," Kokichi says. "Lighten up, Hoshi-chan. You've got an eventful day ahead of you, you know?"

"Is that so?"

"Well I know Momota is going to make you do some weird sort of training tonight," Kokichi tells him. Ryoma gives him an unimpressed stare. "I'm totally not lying for once! He was like, let's gather the most random bunch of people here and make them exercise together. The idiot forgot that my intestines will practically slither out of my body if I bend too much."

"You sound way too gleeful to be lying," Ryoma says quietly. He pauses. "Thanks for the heads up, kid. I'll make sure to stay as far away from Momota as I can today."

"Wait, you're seriously not going to make me endure a night with Momota and Chabashira alone, are you?" Kokichi gasps, putting a hand to his chest. "Wow, you really are a heartless monster!"

"Chabashira is going to be there?" Ryoma asks doubtfully.

"It's a work in progress," Kokichi responds. "I mean, I'm all for watching Chabashira kick his ass for suggesting such a thing so who am I to stop him from asking her to exercise with him?"

Ryoma sighs and shakes his head. "Honestly, you really do say the strangest things."

"I bet you secretly think I'm hilarious."

"If I wanted to tell you I thought you were funny then I would," Ryoma says. "And funny is certainly not the word I would use to describe you."

"Oh? So how would you describe me?"

"Annoying."

Kokichi rolls his hand in a gesture for him to continue. "And?"

"Immature."

"Yikes. You really did wake up on the wrong side of the bed, didn't you?" Kokichi says.

"You look like you didn't wake up at all," Ryoma responds. "Don't you have some sleep to catch up on instead of bothering me?"

"The only reason I look tired is because I want people to think I'm vulnerable," Kokichi says. "That way when they come to attack me, bam! I'll surprise them with a sneak attack that'll catch them off guard!"

"Sure, whatever you say, kid."

"You know, it'd be a lot more fun if you played along with my awesome banter," Kokichi tells him with a pout. "At least Tojo is cool enough to humour me! You're just boring and boring people are the worst!"

"I think I made it pretty clear I didn't want to have a conversation with you in the first place," Ryoma says.

Kokichi grins. "Yet here you are talking to me still."

"Because you won't shut up for even a second," Ryoma retaliates. "I'm only responding so you don't do something immature like yell into my ear."

"Now that sounds like an excellent idea!" Kokichi claps his hands. "But unfortunately it won't be as fun as you'll now be expecting me to yell so I'll have to think of something equally as evil to do to you instead."

"I await with great anticipation."

"That's the spirit!" Kokichi cheers, giggling when Ryoma rolls his eyes with a small huff.

—

Miu and Kokichi compete over who can do the most shots of espresso before Kirumi bans them from the coffee machine. He didn't mean to start a competition but when Miu saw he had three small cups in front of him, she decided to one up him and returned from the kitchen with four.

So of course he went into the kitchen and returned with two more. She then ended up smuggling three cups out with her. He crept out with four more and hid his empty cups under the table.

Truthfully, he didn't plan to end up in such a situation but he's decided that whatever little competition they have going on between them is now *personal* and he's not going to stop drinking until his blood is drowned out by coffee.

Korekiyo of all people isn't helping the situation either as he seems incredibly intrigued about the potential outcome. He's scribbling something furiously into his little notebook he carries around with him, his golden eyes flickering back and forth from the paper to the growing pile of coffee cups that are taking over the table and floor.

Kirumi raises an eyebrow as both Miu and Kokichi hide their cups simultaneously under the table as she re-enters the room with a tray of baked pastries. "I hope the two of you aren't up to something."

"Of course not!" Kokichi insists, acting like he's not practically vibrating on his seat.

Kirumi doesn't look convinced. "You're both...twitching quite a lot."

"That's because we're trying out some new vibrators I made, duh," Miu tells her with a roll of her eyes. "They're extra small so they can be used discreetly when you want to let loose in public."

"There is absolutely nothing discreet about what is happening right now," Kirumi responds with an unimpressed stare. She gestures to the several cups Miu has stupidly left in front of her. "Whilst I simply don't have a comment regarding your latest invention, it's clear the only cause of your sudden inability to keep still is all of the coffee you've been drinking."

"Those cups ain't mine!" Miu retorts. "I only deal with big cups, if you catch my drift. I bet if you didn't use your own chest as a fucking ironing board then you'd know what it's like to have to buy a cup size that's bigger than an A."

Kirumi lets out a justifiably exhausted sigh. "Iruma, this isn't the time or place to be talking about—"

"Don't be such a prude little virgin," Miu huffs. "And quit looking at my chest too, perv! Bet you just want to eye up what a real pair of bad boys look like, huh? Unfortunately for you, all of this is

natural so there's no way in hell you're ever going to get a body that is as perfect as mine!"

"Quite frankly, I don't want--"

"Hah! That's what all titless virgins say!" Miu cackles. "Fine, stare all you want since this might be the only time you'll ever get to see perfection in person! Come on, get a real good look at them!" She thrusts her chest out.

Kirumi shakes her head with an exasperated breath. "If you have nothing important to say then I must carry on with my duties. I still have several dishes I need to prepare."

"Psh, whatever." Miu cups the side of her face with her hand with a pout. "It's not like I care if you look anyway."

"If you want attention then there are better ways of asking for it," Kirumi tells her as she walks past to pick up the cups on the floor with a disapproving click of her tongue. "And I'm turning the coffee machine off if I spot either of you in the kitchen again."

Miu flushes darkly as Kirumi leaves with a trayful of tiny cups. "Bitch..."

"Vibrators? Really?" Kokichi asks with a grin. "As if I'd even use anything that's been touched by you. Imagine all of the diseases I would catch just by even *looking* at something you've made."

"W-Why are you being so m-mean?!" Miu trembles as her eyes water. She bites her lip.

"The real question is why are you so vulgar?" Korekiyo asks as he finishes jotting down his notes. "It's very strange for a girl to act the way you do."

Miu's demeanour does an instant one eighty as she scowls. "Hah? And what the fuck is that supposed to mean? Like hell am I being bullied by a creep like you! Betcha wear all those bandages because you're so sensitive that you'll start blowing your load if someone even touches your skin!"

"If you must know, I wear all these bandages because I find them aesthetically pleasing," Korekiyo explains. "I think they complement my uniform very well."

"Your uniform fucking sucks," Miu says. "And I bet you only wear a mask so you can hide all the lewd expressions you make when you spend all your time gawping at people like a creepy perv. Is that what you are? A creepy little perv who has never even been touched by a woman in his life?"

"I don't think I've ever met a woman who is as annoying as you," Korekiyo responds calmly. "It's ever so unfortunate that you'll never meet my standards."

"You have standards?" Miu barely suppresses a snort. "No wonder you're a single virgin. You probably have to beg for people to even look at you."

"I wasn't talking about those sorts of standards," Korekiyo says darkly.

Miu pales. "What the fuck?"

"Uh, yeah, even I'm confused about what you're on about," Kokichi admits. "But more importantly, are you rejecting Iruma?"

"I-I didn't even ask him out anyway!" Miu argues bitterly. "The only person Shinguji should fuck is himself!"

"I'm not interested in looking for a relationship because my heart already belongs to someone else," Korekiyo reveals as he presses his hands to his chest. "I love them as much as they love me."

Miu mouths a very crude 'what the fuck' over to Kokichi, who shrugs with an intrigued expression. "Hey, hey, who is your mysterious girlfriend then? Or boyfriend. Or partner. I don't judge."

"Someone you don't know," Korekiyo answers. "And I would never introduce them to either of you since both of you don't know how to act like actual humans when in the company of other people."

"Fucking rude!" Miu yells as she slams her fists down onto the table, causing all of the cutlery to rattle. "Fuck you, Shinguji. I don't have to act like a human because I'm practically a goddess anyway!"

"Oh, so you're vulgar as you are delusional," Korekiyo says. "Noted."

"Heeeee!"

Kokichi catches Kirumi retreating even further into the kitchen from the corner of his eye. He doesn't blame her. "Don'tcha think you're being really mean, Shinguji-chan? It's not like you're normal either."

"I don't claim to be normal," Korekiyo responds. "In fact, I much prefer things that aren't normal. Exploring different customs and experiencing different lifestyles is why I became the Ultimate Anthropologist in the first place."

"Wow! Are you saying all anthropologists are not normal? You're a shitty representative if that's the case!" Kokichi says with a smile.

"Do you purposefully try and get under everyone's skin?" Korekiyo asks. "If so then you're doing an excellent job."

"Aw thanks," Kokichi says. "I was a little worried that I was getting rusty but your reassurance has left me feeling the most confident I've ever felt!"

"If things were different then I'd love to do a study of both of you," Korekiyo admits. "I would love to know what sort of lives you lived that made you both end up this way. Alas, it's clear that my days are potentially numbered so I would rather focus on much more important things."

"Like?" Kokichi raises a brow. "What else could possibly be more important than *moi*?"

"I'd make a list but I fear I'd run out of paper," Korekiyo answers.

Kokichi grits his teeth with a dejected smile. "Why does every fucking person here think they can insult me and get away with it?"

"Perhaps it is because you're all bark and no bite?" Korekiyo suggests. "I've heard that you call yourself evil but the more nefarious thing you've done is cause minor issues for Tojo when she tried to help you after you were stabbed."

"My god, I'm actually slipping," Kokichi realises as he puts his head in his hands. "This is simply terrible! I have a reputation to uphold!"

"Dude, are you actually having a breakdown?" Miu asks.

“No, he’s being dramatic,” Korekiyo says.

Kokichi nods. “I am known to be on the more dramatic side.”

“Is that so? I never would have noticed,” Korekiyo says.

“Dude, you’re getting roasted by Shinguji of all people,” Miu says with a smirk. “You’re going to have absolutely no reputation left to protect once we get out of here.”

“I’ll just claim that every person here is slandering me,” Kokichi says with a sniff. “Because it’s true, you’re all making up cruel lies about me and I’ve never done anything wrong in my entire life so that makes you all big, fat bullies.”

“Yes, yes, whatever you say,” Korekiyo responds before taking a sip of his tea.

Kokichi grumbles under his breath before sighing loudly, leaning back heavily on his chair. “When is everyone else going to get here? I’m sick of being bullied by you peasants. Hey, Iruma? Where’s Kiibo at? He’s always following you around like a lost puppy, right? Why haven’t you put a leash on him yet?”

“Because he won’t fucking let me,” Miu complains before shrugging. “And why the hell should I know where he is? It’s not my fault he has the nerve to go charge himself every night like a boring bitch. I wanted to do some hardcore maintenance on him last night and he left when I turned my back on him!”

“What sort of maintenance were you doing on him?”

“Oh, you know…” Miu twirls a strand of hair around her finger. “Making sure all his systems were working. I told him I could also give him this amazing vibrating function that would make him so much more useful but he left before I could even show him the blueprints I’d made!”

“Iruma, please don’t turn the Ultimate Robot into the Ultimate Sex Machine,” Kokichi says before pulling a face. “He’s not attractive enough to pull off such a title.”

“I wanted to add the vibrating function so he could give me a massage you dirty fuck,” Miu fires back. “My shoulders just get so tense when I work that I wanted to give Kiibo some sort of function to help me because he’s always saying he wants to help but there’s honestly so much he can do.”

“That’s because he’s literally just a robot designed to be like the average person,” Kokichi says. “There’s absolutely nothing special about him aside from the fact he’s made out of metal.”

Miu shakes her head. “You’re fucking wrong about that, dipshit. Do you know how advanced his AI is?! It takes years of trial and error to create something so complicated! Sure, his professor or whatever really should’ve tried to be more adventurous and could’ve made him even fucking cooler but Kiibo is really special, you know?”

“Woah, Iruma is so desperate to get laid that she’s turned to technology because no person in the entire world even wants to touch her! It’s actually kind of sad,” Kokichi says as Miu turns pink.

“I-It’s not like that, you dick! When you have a talent like mine you tend to appreciate things like this,” Miu huffs.

“I don’t know. That kind of sounds like an excuse to me.”

“Shut the fuck up!”

“Woah, woah, woah! Don’t tell me people are arguing already!” Kaito enters the dining room looking rather dishevelled. “What’s going on?”

“Iruma totally has a crush on Kiiboy!” Kokichi answers, ducking when Miu tries to swat him with her hand.

“No I fucking don’t you sad, pathetic virgin! Go occupy your mouth with something, the bigger the better,” Miu hisses.

“It’s been like this for the last half hour,” Korekiyo explains as Kaito takes a seat next to Kokichi. “I’ve personally found the conversation to be quite interesting to listen to, although it saddens me that a woman is capable of acting in such a tasteless way.”

Miu growls. “Seriously, go fuck yourself, Shinguji!”

“I think you should be more proactive, Iruma,” Kokichi says. “I say fuck him yourself, be the change you want to see in the world!”

“Hah! As if!” Miu scrunches her face up. “He’s probably into some freaky shit that even *I* think is weird.”

Korekiyo’s eyes sparkle. “Now there is this one method that includes rope that I’ve always wanted to-”

“I’ve heard enough!” Kaito covers his ears. “Seriously, what the hell have I walked into?”

“It’s better to just ignore them,” Kirumi says as she emerges from the kitchen with a freshly made cup of tea. Kaito’s eyes light up when she passes the cup over to him. “Good morning, Momota. I hope you managed to get a good night’s rest.”

“It was good until I realised *someone* left in the middle of the night *again*,” Kaito says as he gives Kokichi a pointed glare. “The whole point of you staying in my room was to get some sleep. Where the hell did you go?”

“I was kidnapped by aliens as soon as you fell asleep,” Kokichi answers with wide eyes. “They told me that they were saving me from you because they’ve heard of how scary you are and that you’re the worst astronaut in the entire world!”

“He went into the casino to annoy me,” Ryoma says as he makes a sudden appearance. He leans across the table to grab an apple, wiping it on his jacket sleeve before taking a bite out of it.

“What? You thought our little heart to heart was annoying?” Kokichi snuffles. “But I thought we bonded so much! I already planned how we were going to spend the rest of our lives together! I was even going to make you my best man at my wedding!”

Ryoma sighs as Kokichi bursts into tears. “Cool your jets, kid.”

“I wouldn’t worry too much about being his best man,” Miu says. “No one is going to marry him anyway.”

“Nuh uh! I get hundreds of marriage proposals a day!” Kokichi insists, instantly switching off the waterworks. “You’re the one who is never going to get married, you miserable cow.”

“S-Seriously! Why are you so mean to me?!” Miu trembles violently, tears gathering in the corner of her eyes. It’s difficult to pinpoint if she’s actually upset or is secretly enjoying the insults.

“We’re getting off track!” Kaito sighs, running a hand down his face. “Ouma, I thought I was getting somewhere with you yesterday.”

“Eh, really? In what way?” Kokichi blinks before a grin creeps up on his face. “Oh, I get it now. Momota is trying to court me. Aw man, you should’ve said something earlier, spaceman!”

“Quit screwing around, you know that’s not what I meant!” Kaito pouts. “Seriously, why do you have to be like this? Can’t you be fucking serious about something for once in your life? I’m trying to help you!”

“And as previously established yesterday, I do not need any help,” Kokichi responds. “I am the most capable person in the entire galaxy I’ll have you know.”

“Yeah, the most capable person of being a walking disaster!” Miu snorts before holding up her hand for a high five. She snarls when no one presses their hand into hers. “Well fuck all of you!”

“I just think Momo-chan is embarrassing himself,” Kokichi says. “Because he’s so insecure that he personally goes around looking for people he views as weak and preys on them hoping that helping them will distract him from his own miserable problems.”

Miu clears her throat uncomfortably as both Ryoma and Korekiyo turn their heads to the side. “Um, are we having a full blown domestic here or something?”

“No, Momota just thinks that he knows better than everyone when he clearly doesn’t!” Kokichi responds.

“Well you’re the prick who keeps running off every time someone tries to help you,” Kaito counters. “You do realise that if you keep running away from your problems then sooner or later people are going to stop chasing after you.”

“Oh, what a relief! It’s almost as if that’s what I wanted from the very start!”

“Maybe this isn’t the time or place for arguing over something so...personal,” Kirumi suggests gently as she clasps her hands down by her waist. “Perhaps you should all get a start on breakfast instead whilst it’s fresh. I have a feeling Monokuma will be coming soon and I don’t want anyone to lose their appetite over him.”

Kokichi huffs as he reaches for the fruit bowl, raiding it for an apple and a bunch of grapes. He catches Kaito giving him a disapproving look from the corner of his eye but makes it obvious that he’s blatantly ignoring him.

At least he’s making some sort of progress when it comes to chipping away at Kaito’s patience. Honestly, fuck Kaito for trying to befriend him when he was at his most vulnerable yesterday. Who does he think he is waltzing around like he’s some sort of God who needs to be worshipped? Kokichi never asked for him to be his friend and it’s just his unfortunate look that Kaito decided to take one look at him and go yep, this is the poor soul I want to make my pet project to ignore my own problems.

Why can’t he be like everyone else? Why can’t he just play along with his ridiculous conversations and get annoyed with him for saying inappropriate shit? Why has he made it his personal mission to try and embarrass him by suggesting that he even needs help in the first place? If he wanted help, which he *doesn’t*, then he would’ve asked for it.

What Kaito doesn't get is that they're two completely different people. Kaito wants to believe in people. Kokichi doubts every person he meets. Kaito thinks that he's some sort of hero who can save everyone from themselves and Monokuma. Kokichi is a realist who knows the game isn't going to end so easily. Kaito selfishly expects people to open up about their own problems without talking about his own. Kokichi minds his own damn business and expects people to do the same.

It's like Kaito thinks if he keeps pushing and pushing and pushing that he'll end up crying to him about how yes, maybe there *are* some things that are really pushing him to his fucking limit but he's a big boy and he can sort out his own shit. He's done it for years now so if Kaito thinks he can just barge into his life and tear down the meticulously built walls he's been building for years then oh boy, does he have another thing coming.

God, things were so much easier when Kaito hated him and he had his sidekicks to keep him occupied.

...wait, *what?*

Kokichi rubs his eyes before he pulls a purple grape from the vine and plops it into his mouth. Wow, he must be so sleep deprived that now he's starting to make shit up. Although...maybe getting Kaito to fixate on someone else won't be such a bad idea. If it means Kaito leaves him alone then...

Everyone here has problems, right? Ryoma certainly has a lifetime's worth of issues that would keep Kaito occupied for years. Tenko might whip him into shape too if Kokichi pushes her enough. Hell, he heard Miu wailing the other day about how she didn't want to die. She must have some sort of underlying trauma that can be exploited to turn Kaito's focus onto her.

Man, why didn't he think of this before? It's an absolutely fool proof plan! He can get some peace and quiet whilst Kaito gets someone to dote over whilst ignoring his own deep rooted problems. No one gets as pushy as Kaito is acting without a reason so it's obvious Kaito has *something* he's desperately trying to avoid.

As he smiles to himself like a dastardly villain, everyone else turns up for breakfast. Kiibo sits down next to Miu whilst Tenko sits with Tsumugi, whose entire face brightens when she realises Kokichi is no longer being forced to stay in bed. Christ, he hopes he doesn't have to deal with her bullshit today.

Everyone rambles on about the new floors of the school for a little while. Kiibo laments about how he still hasn't gotten a lab of his own yet whilst Kirumi reassures him he might get one soon. Tenko warns all the boys away from her dojo whilst Korekiyo happily discusses how he's found some ultra rare artefacts in his lab that he must absolutely have a better look at today.

"I hope I get a lab soon," Tsumugi says before pausing thoughtfully. "Although we only got more labs because Angie and Gonta died, right? Ah, as much as I want mine I plainly don't want anyone else to die."

"I-I agree!" Kiibo stammers, cheeks turning a dusty red as he realises how tone deaf his previous words were. "I'd rather we all stayed alive rather than me getting a lab."

"I want a lab," Kokichi says abruptly. "And I hope it's full of super cool things like an escape car or an epic throne for me to sit on whilst I bark out orders to all my loyal minions!"

"Well all you have to do is hope that someone dies so your lab might be built next!" Monokuma pops up out of literal thin air. Kokichi instinctively scrapes his chair to the side to get as far away

from him as possible.

“What are you doing here?” Tenko snaps. “It was bad enough that you ruined our breakfast yesterday!”

“I gave you all lots of gifts!” Monokuma cries. “At least pretend to be a little grateful!”

“Whilst I am grateful for my lab, I do wonder how you managed to find so many rare items,” Korekiyo admits. “A lot of the items you put into my lab should be in museums or are said to have gone missing entirely.”

“Maybe Monokuma put fake items in your lab?” Ryoma suggests.

Monokuma shakes his head. “No, no, no! Everything in there is genuine!”

“It’s true,” Korekiyo says. “I checked everything over and every single item is the real deal.”

“Woah, it’s kind of scary how much power Monokuma holds to be able to get his paws on such stuff,” Tsumugi says with a shudder. “Unless you stole everything?”

“Even if everything is stolen, I can reassure you all that every item is now in safe hands,” Korekiyo says.

“Literally no one asked or cares,” Miu responds with a roll of her eyes.

Kirumi sighs before taking control of the conversation. “Monokuma, is there something you wish to tell us? Every time you pop up it’s always to tell us something. Well, mostly bad news but I rest my case.”

“I’ve come to hand out the next motive of course!” Monokuma proudly smiles. “I’ll admit, I had to rush a little because the motives I had lined up for you all were...compromised and I decided they were boring anyway so I decided to present you all with something different!”

“So you’re...giving us something?” Kiiibo asks hesitantly. “Why?”

“I’m giving you all a reason to kill!” Monokuma answers. “Just a little push in the right direction to turn on your precious friends and find the will to leave this place!”

“And what if we say we don’t want the motive?” Korekiyo asks.

Monokuma rolls his eyes. “Then I’ll say I don’t care because you’re all getting a motive whether you want one or not! So...” He reaches behind his back and as if by magic, produces several sealed envelopes. “Let me all introduce you to the new motive! Here I have a series of envelopes with dark secrets inside. Only, these dark secrets are all linked to each of you!”

“So...you’re going to reveal our deepest, darkest secrets?” Tsumugi asks nervously.

“Not exactly,” Monokuma says. “I haven’t put a name on any of these envelopes meaning no one knows whose secret they’re going to get. Everyone is going to get one envelope each and you all must open and read what’s inside unless you want to be punished.”

“This sounds like a pretty lame motive if you ask me,” Miu comments as Monokuma presses a random envelope into her hands. “If the secret is anonymous then who gives a fuck what’s written down?”

“Sometimes people don’t want embarrassing secrets to get out,” Monokuma responds gleefully as

he finishes handing the envelopes out. “And spoilers, some of the secrets in those envelopes are pretty spicy. Doesn’t it make you nervous not knowing what someone else may learn about you?”

“W-Well even if something embarrassing is revealed about Tenko, she doesn’t have to own up to which secret is hers,” Tenko says as she plays with the edges of her envelope.

“Someone could just figure out which secret belongs to each person,” Korekiyo points out.

“Yeah, well, that’s only if we agree to share secrets,” Kaito says before pausing. “I promise that no matter whose secret I read, I ain’t going to judge anyone nor am I going to say what the secret is.”

“But what if it’s a truly horrible secret?” Tsumugi asks with wide eyes. “What if it’s a secret that deserves to be revealed.”

“Yeah, what if I read that someone is a mass murderer or something?” Miu adds. “If someone gets a secret like that then fucking warn the rest of us, okay? I don’t want to deal with a lunatic on top of everything else!”

“What counts as a super serious secret anyway?” Kiibo asks as he reads the letter inside of his envelope. “I find the secret in my envelope to be actually kind of silly.”

“Well when you put it like that it makes me plainly curious about what secret you got,” Tsumugi admits.

Kokichi rolls his eyes as he opens his envelope and reads the letter that’s inside.

‘This person forged illegal documents to get to where they are now.’

Well that isn’t something Kokichi is going to go feral over. He raises a brow at Monokuma, who watches everyone open their envelopes one by one with a pleased expression. If each secret is going to be as...irrelevant as the one he got then Kokichi doubts a murder is going to start any time soon.

“Hey, hey, Momota,” Kokichi says as he nudges the astronaut’s arm. “I totally got your secret.”

“Wait, what?” Kaito blinks in surprise. “How’d you know?”

“Um, are we supposed to say if we’ve figured out whose secret we’ve got?” Tsumugi asks. “It kinda defeats the entire purpose of keeping the secrets anonymous.”

“W-Well if Ouma insists he has mine then it won’t hurt to take a little look at what’s on his letter, right?” Kaito says.

“Only if Momota shows me the secret he got!” Kokichi barbers as he holds his envelope out of reach.

“But I don’t think I got yours,” Kaito admits.

“I don’t think we should go around trading envelopes,” Kirumi says firmly. Her letter crumples in her hand as she holds onto it tightly. There’s a grimace on her face. “I know we had to open the letters and read them but that doesn’t mean we have to acknowledge the secrets we’ve been given. It’ll be for the best if we turn a blind eye just this once-”

“I feel kind of sick knowing someone might know something horrible about me!” Tsumugi confesses. She adjusts her glasses. “I-Isn’t it better if we just, well, read each secret aloud so we all

know what we're dealing with at least? W-We don't have to put a name to the secrets but I...really hate not knowing what Monokuma knows about me."

Ah, of course Tsumugi is trying to cause trouble. One one hand she does have a point. If all of the secrets are out in the open then that means no one is going to kill over trying to find out their secret. However, since Tsumugi of all people wants all the secrets revealed then it must be for a reason. She flashes him a smug look before looking away. Kokichi narrows his eyes.

"Tenko...supposes if we do that then that means we'll know to be wary if one of the secrets is really dangerous," Tenko says slowly. "But that also means there's a risk that an embarrassing secret might come out about someone too."

"I'd rather take a little humiliation over death," Korekiyo says, tugging on his mask. "And I must admit that the secret I've been given isn't anything too dramatic."

"I bet you'd get off on being humiliated, huh?" Miu laughs wildly. "I bet you're hiding a raging hard on under the table!"

"Iruma..." Kirumi pinches the bridge of her nose before sighing. "If people are on board with reading their secrets out then I'll happily oblige. However, it's only fair if the majority agree that it's the right thing to do."

"So we're going to have a vote?" Tsumugi asks. "But what if it's split down the middle?"

"There's nine of us, dumbass. The vote can't be split evenly," Miu points out as she rolls her eyes. "Honestly, you're brainless as you are breastless too."

"Well Tenko already said that she thinks...maybe putting the secrets out in the open might help in the long run," Tenko reveals. "N-Not that Tenko wants to be malicious, she just wants to know what we're all dealing with."

"I agree," Tsumugi says. "Even though the secret I got is rather tame, someone might have received a really scary one that everyone needs to be wary about."

"Shirogane's logic is very hard to argue against," Kiibo adds. "I too think it would be for the best if we read out our secrets."

Kokichi pulls a face as Tsumugi once again flashes him another smug look. He suddenly feels incredibly uncomfortable.

"Well I'm going to believe in everyone no matter what!" Kaito declares with a pump of his fist. "There's no way I'm going to let Monokuma scare us into killing!"

"Is that so?" Monokuma grins.

"If it's to protect everyone in the long run then I shall read the secret I received to everyone," Kirumi says.

"Well that's five people who said yes already so the majority has already been decided," Tsumugi realises. "Um, is that okay with everyone who hasn't voted yet?"

"Of course," Korekiyo says. "The wording of the secret I got is rather vague so I'm going to presume that every other secret is the same, meaning it'll be very hard to link each secret back to a specific person."

“I mean, I’d rather not have anything that might damage my reputation be revealed but whatever,” Miu grumbles. “Like Shitguji said, it’ll probably be hard to figure out the owner of each secret anyway.”

“Ouma figured out whose secret he got straight away though,” Tenko points out. “Unless he was just lying?”

“Nope, I’m just suuuper smart,” Kokichi says. “And I personally think that the fact Shirogane has been pushing for us to read the secrets out to be very fishy. Only Monokuma would want to cause chaos and that is what’s gonna happen once all the secrets are revealed.”

“I-I’m not trying to cause any problems!” Tsumugi blinks in shock. “I just...plainly thought that it’ll help us grow closer as friends if we prove to Monokuma that it doesn’t matter if our secrets get revealed, we’ll all still trust each other anyway.”

Barf. “Wow, did you copy that line from one of your shitty mangas or something?”

“It’s how I really feel!” Tsumugi argues. “A-And I want to prove to anyone that there’s no hard feelings about Gonta’s trial. Having so many people think I was capable of murder...plainly hurt but now I want to prove that I’ve already forgiven everyone by not judging them when their secret gets put out in the open.”

Yikes, now she’s guilt tripping everyone. It’s somewhat working as a majority of the people in the room suddenly have an uncomfortable look on their face.

“I think it’s still a risky plan,” Ryoma abruptly admits. “And it’s inevitable that we’re all going to figure out whose secret belongs to who eventually.”

“Well by then we’ll all have bonded with each other enough to not judge, right?” Tsumugi counters. “I’m sorry that you feel that way Hoshi but the majority vote is that we’re going to read the secrets out so...”

“...right,” Ryoma says quietly, fiddling with his envelope. “Then who is starting?”

“Well if Ouma thinks he has mine then he might as well read it out,” Kaito says. He gives Kokichi an expectant look. “Well?”

“This person forged illegal documents to get to where they are now,” Kokichi reads out dramatically. He raises a brow. “Well, am I right, Momota-chan?”

“H-How’d you figure that out?” Kaito rubs the back of his neck sheepishly.

“Because if you think about it logically, you must’ve started your astronaut training at a young age and you need to be a lot older to actually do the tests that qualify you for the training,” Kokichi says. “Or am I wrong?”

“I wasn’t going to let anything get in the way of me going to space!” Kaito declares proudly, pounding his fists together. “Like what’s going to stop me from reaching the stars, the *law*?”

“Typically that is usually what happens,” Kirumi says with a disapproving sigh. “So are you confirming that secret belongs to you then, Momota?”

“Hell yeah! I’m not ashamed that I had to cut a few corners to get to where I am!” Kaito reveals brightly. “Nothing gets in the way of the Luminary of the Stars!” Kokichi is almost impressed with how easily Kaito will break the rules to get what he wants.

Dare he say that he even admires that ambition?

“Very well then, Momota. Perhaps you should read what secret you got next?” Korekiyo suggests.

Kaito clears his throat. “This person has once worked with one the most dangerous people in the entire world for money.”

There’s a sigh before Kirumi speaks up. “I believe that is my secret and I would like to explain the context behind it before people start to get the wrong idea.”

“Tojo? Who the fuck did you work for?” Miu stares at her in awe.

“I’m afraid I can’t name actual names since I’ve been sworn to secrecy but I ended up tutoring a very influential person’s child since their grades weren’t up to standard. They ended up starting a very successful business at a very young age,” Kirumi explains.

“And this child belonged to an extremely dangerous person?” Tenko asks.

Kirumi nods. “It’s surprising how many feared people actually have a soft spot for their family. Once I realised what my request truly was I no longer feared that I was being asked to do something out of my comfort zone”

“That’s pretty cool,” Tenko admits. “So Tojo, are you ready to read your letter out now?”

“Of course.” Kirumi straightens out her piece of paper. “This person caused permanent bodily harm to someone they really care about.”

Ouch. There’s an awkward pause as no one decides to elaborate further. However, Kokichi spots Kiibo grimace to himself and it doesn’t take a genius to figure out whose secret that belongs to.

Kirumi winces apologetically as she silently waits for someone to say something.

Since Tenko is sitting next to Kirumi, she reads her given secret next. “This person is actually a virgin.”

Miu splutters instantly. “W-What?! What a p-pathetic secret!” She laughs nervously as she strangles the blood circulation out of her finger with a strand of hair. “Wow, glad *I-I’m* not the loser who is still a virgin.”

Tsumugi laughs awkwardly. “Well, I guess it’s my turn.” Kokichi stares at her intensely. “This person...has a complicated relationship with their sister.”

He raises an eyebrow along with several other people. Not entirely a ground-breaking secret but it’s certainly one that needs some context given to it. However, no one speaks up so Korekiyo reads from his letter instead.

“This person held a week-long funeral for their cat when they were a child.”

“It’s what she deserved,” Ryoma murmurs quietly, tugging on one of the ears on his hat.

“That’s actually really sweet,” Tsumugi says with a warm smile.

“How is that your darkest secret?” Korekiyo asks. “Didn’t you murder a lot of people and go to prison for it?”

“It’s not like any of that is a secret so...” Ryoma uncomfortably looks away. “Makes me wonder

how Monokuma knew about my childhood cat though since I don't have any living relatives that could've told him about it."

"I have my way of finding out secrets," Monokuma responds ominously.

"Well, it looks like it's my turn," Kiibo quickly says before Monokuma can say anything else creepy. "This person has actually kissed several boys."

"Wow, I wonder whose secret that is," Miu says with a roll of her eyes.

Tenko flushes. "W-Well Tenko was a different person a couple of years ago! I-It's not like those kisses meant anything either!"

"No one is judging you, Chabashira," Kirumi reassures her. "*Right*, Iruma?"

"Yeah, yeah..." Miu laughs quietly to herself before clearing her throat. "Listen up virgins because now it's my time to speak so open your ears up real wide because I ain't fucking repeating myself okay? This person goes to the bathroom for reasons that are extremely unexpected."

"That's...a weird secret," Tenko says with a frown.

"Hey, that secret isn't related to what Angie said, right?" Kaito suddenly asks. "Y'know how she said there's a secret passageway in the girl's bathroom? Is that secret, well, linked to that?"

"Maybe someone just likes hooking up in the bathroom?" Miu suggests with a shrug. "I don't fucking know but that certainly isn't my secret."

"It is a little strange though," Tsumugi says. "But maybe it's for the best if we don't dwell on it for too long since it looks like no one wants to admit that it's their secret."

"Probably because they don't want to get bullied," Miu murmurs under her breath.

"So that leaves me to last, huh?" Ryoma sighs, tugging on his hat. He frowns as he reads what is on his letter. "Geez, of course I'd be given a secret like this."

"Did you not read your letter before?" Tsumugi asks.

Ryoma pulls a face. "Didn't really care what was on it to be honest but now that I've read it..."

"Well, what does it say?" Kaito asks. "Surely it can't be that bad, right?"

Ryoma grimaces. "This person knows a secret that will kickstart the demise of the killing game if it gets out."

"Wait...what?" Tenko gasps in disbelief. "You mean...someone here can actually end the game right now and *isn't it*?"

"What the hell?" Miu growls. "Which one of you selfish fuckers is forcing this killing game to continue?! If you know how to end the killing game then spit it out before I choke the answer out of ya!"

"Um, Iruma, you don't even know who you need to choke," Tsumugi timidly points out.

Miu flicks her hair dismissively at her. "Who the fuck cares about that?! I'll choke everyone here if it means I'll finally get to leave this hell hole!"

“No one is choking anyone,” Kirumi firmly states with a stern glare. “Whilst that secret definitely has the most potential to start an argument, we don’t know all the facts. We don’t know if it’s actually safe for the individual to reveal how to end the killing game.”

“Even if they know how to end the game, maybe they don’t have the right resources to do so, which is why they haven’t said anything yet?” Kiibo suggests helplessly.

“But surely it would be beneficial for everyone to know how to end the game,” Korekiyo says as he strokes his chin. “So if the individual with the knowledge on how to end the game dies then at least we’ll all know how to leave.”

“Surely they’ve gotta have some reason why they’re keeping so quiet,” Kaito says with a thoughtful expression, pressing his fists together. “I refuse to believe that someone is keeping quiet out of malice.”

“M-Maybe they just don’t want the fucking rest of us to know so they have a better chance at leaving?!” Miu tugs on her hair. “This is so unfair! Whoever the fuck is holding out on us better grow some damn balls and spill the beans before I-”

“W-We’re already letting Monokuma win by arguing!” Tsumugi cries out. “Guys, we’re giving him everything he hoped for! He wants us to argue!”

“It seems like this motive is more directed towards the person who knows how to end the game more than anyone else,” Korekiyo points out. “Quite frankly, getting wound up now is just a waste of time. All we have to do is keep an eye on anyone acting extra paranoid and presume that they’re the one holding out on us.”

Shitshitshit. Kokichi rests his hands behind his head as he puts on his best poker face. “Oh wow, now this certainly isn’t boring!”

“Ouma, this isn’t the time to be joking around,” Kirumi says with a frown. “This is serious.”

“We...could just start eliminating people?” Kiibo suggests nervously. “We already know which secrets belong to Momota, Tojo, Hoshi, Chabashira and Iruma-”

“The fuck are you on about?! My secret hasn’t been revealed!” Miu retorts hotly. “Don’t be such a presumptuous idiot!”

Kiibo helplessly holds his hands up. “B-But I thought by your reaction when Chabashira read her secret out-”

“Geez, Kiibo, why are you bullying Iruma so much?” Kokichi asks. “Especially since she was going on and on about how awesome she thinks you actually are this morning when you weren’t even here.”

“You were?” Kiibo’s eyes go hopefully wide.

Miu hides her face with her arm. “J-Just said what I thought, that’s all.”

“And besides,” Kokichi continues with a sheepish pout. “That was my secret so...”

“O-Oh!” Kiibo turns bright red. “I-I didn’t mean to, um...ah this is really awkward.”

“Yeah, well, I have very high standards,” Kokichi says with a haughty sniff, crossing his arms and turning away when Miu stares at him with her jaw hanging wide open. He’ll have to hope she

doesn't snitch on him now and deal with her later. Hopefully her pride will keep her quiet enough to not reveal that he's hijacked her secret. "And I've not met a single person yet who has met them."

He swallows as everyone takes in his lie, pausing to think his reveal over awkwardly. Perhaps it's a blessing that the secret is so...*personal* that he doubts anyone is going to grill him about not speaking up about it sooner.

"I thought someone who is as confident as you would've..." Tsumugi clears her throat. "Well, um, never mind."

Fuck Tsumugi. If she and Monokuma think they can scare him into a corner using this motive then they're very wrong. Of course Monokuma deliberately picked his secret to relate to what happened with Tsumugi, Gonta and Angie. He knows that if he says Tsumugi is the real killer then another trial will be held. He doesn't know if she'll put up a fight or not but he doubts that Monokuma is going to kill her off so early so he has no clue what Monokuma is playing at.

Is this just a fear tactic? Is Monokuma trying to get the group to turn against him? Well, he's certainly caused some tension anyhow.

Kokichi has already planned to try and force Tsumugi out of this game by keeping her alive. It makes Kokichi wonder if Tsumugi *wants* to actually get caught in the end. Does she want to do some sort of dramatic reveal where she tells all the remaining survivors that she got someone as pure as Gonta killed so she could cause trouble for everyone? She gets off on causing despair so he's confident a truth bomb like that would cause anguish for everyone.

She's certainly a frustrating enemy to deal with. It always feels like he's taking one step forward but two steps back with her. Well, if she thinks she can get under his skin so easily then she's going to have to try harder. If he has to cause a little chaos to keep his secret safe then everyone better get ready because he's going to forcibly get through this motive unscathed, casualties be damned. It's about time he proved a point around here.

"Well it looks like things are getting pretty heated up around here," Monokuma says. "It's such a beautiful sight!"

"Oh piss off already," Miu says as she grits her teeth. "Things are already shitty enough without having to deal with your fuckery too."

"How dare you talk to me that way!" Monokuma huffs. "I'm your headteacher and you will show me some respect!"

"Do you honestly think anyone here will respect you after what you've done to us?" Korekiyo asks. "After what you did to Gonta and Angie?"

Monokuma shrugs. "I don't know, I thought maybe I'd receive some grim sort of admiration at least for having the guts to do something so horrible to you all."

"What sort of twisted logic is that?" Tenko huffs. "Of course none of us here will ever admire you!"

"Wow, how am I supposed to function after hearing such a devastating statement like that?" Monokuma asks with a snuffle. "And after I was kind enough to warn you about the lying scum who is holding you all back from escaping this place too! I'm honestly heartbroken!"

"As a robot I can confirm that you definitely do not have a heart," Kiibo says. "So please stop

spreading misinformation, thank you very much.”

“Ugh, you’re the reason why robots shouldn’t exist,” Monokuma groans. “You’re always so uptight and boring. I’m leaving before you start lecturing me on something I will never care about.”

Kiibo stammers helplessly as Monokuma escapes from the room before smiling dejectedly into his hand. “As a fellow robot I thought he would’ve been more understanding about the harmful consequences of spreading false information around about ourselves-”

“Kiiboy, literally no one cares,” Kokichi says unapologetically.

Kaito nudges his arm disapprovingly so Kokichi retaliates by kicking his ankle under the table whilst Kirumi decides to once again be the only voice of reason in the entire room. “Everyone, please take a moment to calm down. I know we weren’t expecting to hear a secret that is so... frustrating to deal with, but we need to consider the fact that maybe Monokuma, well, could’ve made up some of the secrets to cause tension.”

“That...does sound like something he would do,” Tenko says slowly. “And whilst Tenko would love to know how to leave...Tenko thinks it would be easier to presume that the secret Hoshi got might just be a lie.”

“Fine by me,” Ryoma says with a shrug.

“B-But aren’t you worried that someone might come after you for revealing such a damning secret?” Tsumugi asks him cautiously. “What if the secret is true and you’ve just ruined someone’s chance of getting out of here unnoticed?”

“If someone really has the knowledge to leave and has all the resources to do so then I doubt they’d still be here,” Kaito points out. “But whoever they are, I believe in them. Don’t know why they’re keeping so quiet but it’s gotta be for a good reason, right?”

“*Fuck no*, they’re getting in the way of me leaving!” Miu snaps. “So come on, whoever is lying to us should just get it over and done with and tell us what the fuck they know instead of being a selfish bastard.”

“Perhaps if you asked them to tell the truth more nicely then they might be more inclined to do so?” Kiibo suggests. “You know, instead of insulting them.”

“Well going by Kiibo’s logic from earlier, we can probably narrow down the potential suspects, right?” Korekiyo says. “Wouldn’t that be much easier to do?”

“Absolutely not,” Kirumi says firmly. “I will not allow anyone here to be harmed and I fear that this situation has gotten completely out of control already. Even if it is mildly frustrating that someone is hiding something so important from the rest of us, they have every right to feel safe here. Everyone, please remember that Monokuma is our enemy, not each other.”

“Yeah, maybe we should just forget that this conversation even happened?” Tenko proposes. “Tenko doesn’t like how hostile the atmosphere has become.”

“Well everyone voted for the secrets to be read so...” Kokichi shrugs. “Actions have consequences, you know?”

“Yeah, well...” Miu puts her hands on her hips. “I ain’t staying in a room full of scaredy cats and liars. Fuck this!”

She storms out loudly, her heeled boots clacking against the floor noisily. Miu purposefully makes sure to slam the door on her way out.

“Oh dear...” Tsumugi murmurs, wringing her hands together. “If I thought that things were going to turn out this way then I never would’ve suggested that we read the secrets out. I just thought...”

“You were only trying to help,” Kiibo reassures her. “It’s not like you knew one of the secrets was going to be so...damning.”

“Why isn’t anyone concerned about the secret Tojo read out?” Tenko asks with a frown. “You know, about someone hurting someone they really care about? That’s really messed up.”

“I hope that there’s some sort of reasonable context behind that secret,” Korekiyo agrees. “But looking at everyone here, well, I doubt anyone here is capable of hurting someone they hold dear for a bad reason.”

“Maybe Monokuma just twisted the wording of the secret to make it sound a lot worse than it actually is?” Kaito suggests.

“How about we just move the conversation onto something else?” Kirumi says. “It’s clear that a lot of us are feeling very agitated right now and I don’t want to let Monokuma win. Please, everyone wait here whilst I brew us all a nice cup of tea.”

Kokichi groans as he rests his head on the table. He feels the weight of Tsumugi’s stare during the rest of his time in the dining hall.

—

Miu practically bulldozes him into a wall when she spots him walking through the hallways. “Hey, what the fuck do you think you’re playing at saying that my secret is yours?!”

“Oh, so you admit that you’re a pathetic virgin?” Kokichi asks.

“Shh! Don’t be so fucking loud!” Miu hushes him despite the fact that they’re alone. “Listen, I don’t care if you actually are a virgin or not but that secret clearly doesn’t belong to you so I want to know why you lied! Don’t tell me you’re the fucker who knows how to actually end the-”

“Of course I’m not, you daft cow,” Kokichi grumbles, pushing her away so that she’s not breathing in his face. “But, well, *my* secret had already been claimed by someone else so it was only fair I got to take someone else’s instead.”

“Hah?” Miu narrows her eyes. “What the fuck are you on about?”

“Well you see...” Kokichi looks from side to side before lowering his voice. “Between you and me, Tojo totally hijacked my secret. I’m the one who has worked with one of, if not, the most dangerous person in the world for a little extra pocket money.”

“Bullshit! You?” Miu snorts. “Quit being a lying dumbass and-”

“Do you honestly think I’m lying?” Kokichi sneers as his face twists into something much more sinister. Miu turns pale. “Do you think I’ve been lying about my evil organisation? Of course someone like me has all sorts of connections with super dangerous people. Honestly, I’m just impressed that Tojo had the gall to lie about the secret being hers. I should have her tongue cut out.”

“I-I thought you were just fucking around when you said you were evil!” Miu insists as a trickle of sweat runs down her cheek. “Q-Quit looking at me like that! You look creepy as hell, dude!”

“Are you insulting me?” Kokichi asks. “Because that’s a first class ticket to my super hidden dungeon where you’ll live the rest of your days rotting in a tiny little cell all alone.”

“Fucking hell, it was a joke!” Miu holds her hands up. “F-Fine! I-I don’t give a shit that you took my secret anyway.”

“Then why get all so defensive about it, hmm? Are you that insecure?” Kokichi asks.

“I’m not insecure!” Miu snaps. “I’m just...waiting for the right person, okay?! I’m a motherfucking goddess so I should be treated like one!”

“Okay, cool, whatever then,” Kokichi says. “Are you done trying to run me over with your ugly cow udders or am I free to go now?”

“U-Udders?!” Miu groans. He swears a trickle of drool escapes the side of her mouth.

“Ew, don’t tell me you’re actually getting off on this conversation, are you?”

“O-Of course I’m not!” Miu insists as she trembles on the spot. “A-Anyway, do you think that it’s Tojo who is the one hiding such a big secret from us all? If she took your secret then that must mean...”

“Who knows,” Kokichi says. “But it wouldn’t surprise me if she is.”

“That *bitch!*” Miu grits her teeth. “She better sleep with one eye fucking open tonight.”

Kokichi rolls his eyes as Miu storms off, muttering to herself about something he can’t decipher. He ends up going back to his room for some peace and quiet. He has an irritating headache he simply can’t shake off.

—

Angie’s art room is full of art supplies he’s never even heard of before. He’s currently sitting on a block of wax, watching as Angie hums to herself. Her coat sleeves are rolled up as she goes through her cans of paint noisily.

“Angie thinks...” She pulls out a can of bright pink paint. “That this colour is the one she wants to use! Don’t you think it’s such a lovely colour?”

She spins around and shows him the paint happily, oblivious to the splatter of paint that lands on the floor due to her jerky movement. He peers into the can and notices that the paint looks a little too watery and has an odd smell to it. He wonders if it’s even paint at all. However, Angie seems happy with her choice and she hauls the can over to a large canvas.

The artist dunks her hands into the can and starts to finger paint on the white canvas, smearing pink everywhere almost frantically. It’s extremely difficult to tell what she’s actually painting but since she’s the professional here he’s confident that she knows what she’s doing.

“Angie thinks she should use pink more often,” Angie admits as she slaps the canvas hard.

“Angie’s God doesn’t usually recommend it to her but since she can’t hear him anymore, well, Angie thinks it’s her turn to pick what colours she uses now.”

He tilts his head to the side. When did Angie stop being able to hear her God?

It's almost as if she reads his mind. "Angie's God is waiting for her but Angie can't see him just yet." Her hand stills. "Because how can Angie rest knowing that her killer hasn't been punished yet? She's still out there and all Angie can do is watch as she ruins even more lives!"

Angie spins around, her eyes wide and her smile almost haunting. The pink paint trickles down her arms slowly.

"She can't greet her God until she gets justice!" Angie spreads her arms out wide. "So why are you helping keep Angie's killer alive? You know the truth, yes? You were there when Angie died!" She takes a step forward. "For you, no less. It wasn't Angie's time to go yet but she still died. How is that fair?"

He doesn't have an answer for that. Only Tsumugi can attempt to explain her reasoning for all this madness.

"Now Angie is never going to get to grow up!" Angie mournfully points out. "Angie is never going to get to be a bride or have her own family! She's never going to get to go to her island ever again! Who's going to tell her people that Angie died?"

He can't even tell her that everything is going to be okay. It's almost as if he's tongue tied.

"Angie died because of you and you won't even give Angie the justice she deserves," Angie says as she stands in front of him. She wipes her hands clean using her coat. It smears in all of the exact same places where she had bled out on the floor in the dormitory. "Doesn't Angie deserve some sort of closure? Her God is calling for her and she can't even go see him."

He's sorry. He knows it's wrong but if forcing Tsumugi out of the game helps in the long run then some sacrifices have to be made. Angie will get her closure eventually but until then...

"Angie wishes it was you who died," Angie suddenly says. He snaps his head up to look her in the eyes. All he can see is icy blue. "Now get out of Angie's room and never come back."

She pushes him hard and he falls from the block of wax backwards. He gasps as the fall lasts a lot longer than it should. He tries to reach out for something to grab, something to stop the descent but once again he falls and falls and falls until he wakes up abruptly at his desk.

Kokichi lifts his head up with a sharp breath, feeling disorientated as he looks around. He can hear the vague noise of muffled knocking. Whilst he rubs the sleep out of his eyes, the knocking gets louder.

What time is it? How long has he been fitfully sleeping at his desk for? He stumbles over the mess on his floor as he goes to open the door, wondering who on earth wants to see him. When he twists his handle open a hand pushes his door out of the way almost instantly and for a split second he panics that something is going to go horribly wrong but then he sees purple eyes and purple hair and oh, great, it's Kaito.

"Hey...were you sleeping?" Kaito asks, raising an eyebrow.

Kokichi shrugs as he continues to rub his eyes tiredly. "What time is it?"

"Late," Kaito answers. Kokichi can see that the sky has gone dark through the glass walls of the dormitory. "And I came to bring you to train with me! Chabashira and Hoshi are waiting outside so you're the only person left I need to get!"

“Huh?” Kokichi blinks before groaning loudly. “Aw man, you were actually being serious last night, weren’t you?”

“If I say I’m gonna do something then I’m gonna do it!” Kaito says. “So you, me, Chabashira and Hoshi are going to do a little training together! Those two can do some light exercise whilst we do something I think you’ll really enjoy.”

“Oh?” Kokichi raises a brow. “What does the great Kaito Momota think I’ll enjoy doing then?”

“Well you’ll have to come outside and find out,” Kaito answers with a smug grin. “Hah, I bet *that’s* got you curious!”

“Are you trying to lure me outside like some sort of pervert?” Kokichi narrows his eyes. “I bet Momota just wants to have another argument with me because he likes being berated. Is that one of your kinks? Humiliation? Geez, you’re like the second person today who has declared their love of being absolutely verbally dominated by someone else!”

“Quit putting words into my mouth!” Kaito crosses his arms. “Listen, I ain’t gonna force you to do anything you don’t want to, okay? If you want to slam the door in my face and stay in your room then fine, I’ll letcha but at least consider joining me for just one night.” He runs a hand through his hair. “And if you completely hate my training then you don’t have to do it ever again. Deal?”

“Why are you being so flexible all of a sudden?” Kokichi asks suspiciously. “I thought you were the type of person who would hound someone until they gave in just to shut you up.”

Kaito laughs suddenly. “Haha, well, that usually is my go to tactic and it works surprisingly well actually. However, something tells me that won’t work well on you.”

“Because I’ll just annoy you right back,” Kokichi agrees. “And I never let anyone tell me what to do in the first place. You should be honoured that I’m even listening to you right now.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m forever in your debt or whatever,” Kaito says with a playful roll of his eyes.

Kokichi holds a finger up. “Not just any sort of debt, a life debt! That means you’ve now agreed to willingly die for me so thanks for signing up to be my personal meat shield. I’ll make sure your lawyer gets a copy of the contract you will be signing with your own blood.”

“C’mon man, I’ve already put my lawyer through so much shit when it came to the whole astronaut training shenanigans,” Kaito says. “How about we should shake on it instead?”

“But I don’t want to catch Momota cooties,” Kokichi says as he sticks his tongue out. “Yuck!”

“Ouma…”

“I can’t shake on anything until I think about my options so don’t you dare think you can bully me into submission!” Kokichi rolls his eyes. “Hmm, let’s see. Spend a couple of hours dealing with Momota or staying in my room where I’ll have peace and quiet. I simply can’t decide.”

Kaito pouts. “C’mon, please? At least take a tiny peek at what I’ve got planned. If you really, *really* don’t want to stay outside then I promise I’ll let you leave and won’t ask you to join me again.”

“Now that is a tempting offer,” Kokichi says, rubbing his chin. “But what’s stopping Momo-chan from hounding me again another day? He says he promises not to bother me again but he’s just admitted that bothering people into submission is his go to tactic and I don’t think Momota knows

how nasty I get when I lose my patience.”

“You’ll just have to trust me,” Kaito tells him with an incredibly earnest look on his face. “Like how you did yesterday with Tojo’s cooking. Nothing bad happened with that now, did it?”

“...why are you trying so hard?” Kokichi abruptly asks. He doesn’t understand. What the hell has he done to make Kaito so captivated with him? “We’re not friends and it’s extremely likely at least one of us is probably going to die soon so why are you wasting your time doing this?”

“Because,” Kaito says. “I want to get to know you, Ouma. Is that so hard to believe?”

“Yes.” Kokichi realises his face has eased into something completely blank. “Momota, you do realise I’m a liar, right? Even if you get to know me tonight then I’m going to be a completely different person tomorrow. Is that the sort of person you want to believe in?”

“Everyone deserves to have someone believe in them,” Kaito responds. “So if that means I’ll have to get to know you over and over again then fine. If you’re going to be a different person tomorrow then I’ll believe in them too.”

“Why?”

“It’s just how I work,” Kaito says. “You lie and I believe. If I have to believe in all your lies to get to know you just a little bit more then fine, bring it on.”

“You’re an idiot,” Kokichi hisses. “People who believe in lies only get hurt in the end, you know? I’ll probably laugh in your face when you finally realise believing in a liar was the worst idea in the world.”

“Yeah, and those will be my consequences for my own actions,” Kaito says. “But the fact you haven’t slammed the door in my face yet makes me think that you actually don’t mind that I’m here right now.”

Kokichi clicks his tongue. “Presumptuous *prick*.”

“Well?” Kaito raises a brow expectantly. “Are you going to join me or are you going to laugh at me for wasting my time?”

“Well since Momota is so hellbent that he thinks he knows me then I’ll see what he has planned,” Kokichi says with an icy smile. “And then I’ll laugh at him in front of an audience just to make my point even clearer that you can’t befriend everyone, you delusional asshole.”

“Yeah, yeah...” Kaito rolls his eyes. “Geez, is your lack of sleep finally catching up to you or are you always this pissy when someone tries to have a civil conversation with you?”

“Careful what you say next, Momo-chan. I don’t take insults lightly,” Kokichi warns.

He bitterly steps outside, his jaw tight as he storms over to the picnic table where he presumes Kaito has set up his planned training for him or whatever. God, he can’t wait to laugh in his face for being so stupid. It might even be therapeutic. He just can’t believe that someone can be so simple minded. Seriously, does Kaito actually know what’s going on or is he impossibly dumb? Has he completely forgotten that he’s also a part of a killing game and that believing in people is the worst sort of gamble he can take at the moment?

Stupid Kaito and his stupid delusional ideals that have no place in a killing game like this. When Kaito inevitably dies because he trusted the wrong person then he’s going to find a way to bring

him back to life then tell him he told him so.

Kaito must be a completely different breed of stupid too for thinking that Kokichi is worth believing in in the first place. Just wait until he finds out about what he's done. Kaito will regret ever trying to believe that a monster can be a good person.

He prepares himself to start laughing so he can head back inside and stew in his own thoughts when he's suddenly winded by what he sees. There's a white puzzle box sitting on the table waiting to be put together. More specifically, a milk puzzle. He stares at it silently.

"I thought we could do it together whilst Chabashira and Hoshi go through some exercises together," Kaito suddenly says from behind him. "I kept wracking my brain to think of something for you to do that doesn't include exercise but also isn't boring. Well, I know milk puzzles don't make a pretty picture in the end but they're fun to put together."

All this effort...just because Kaito wants to be his friend. It's unfathomable. It doesn't make any sense. He doesn't understand why. Why him? What does he want from him? A stable friendship that might only last a couple of hours before one of them dies? Is this just some elaborate prank? Has Kaito figured out what scum he is and is building bridges with him so he can cruelly knock them down at a later date?

Kaito can't just want to be friends just because, right? Because that's just illogical. It's pointless. It's...

...something Kokichi really, *really* doesn't deserve.

Even if he takes the hand that Kaito is holding out for him then Kaito is just going to pull away once he finds out that Kokichi could just end the game right now. Kaito won't *ever* understand what he's trying to accomplish. Kokichi swears he has some sort of method to his madness, it just includes a lot of people dying and keeping Tsumugi alive when she doesn't deserve such mercy.

Only two people can survive this game and Kokichi desperately needs Tsumugi to be one of them so she won't be around during the next game. Monokuma will still be an issue but there must be some way to break him. There's also evidence that suggests more than two people have potentially managed to leave this game at once. He's not completely sure if Shuichi, Himiko and Maki left the exact same game but that's a gamble he's just going to have to take.

Making friends, no, *allies* when Kokichi knows he's not going to be able to leave with any of them during this...this *loop* is pointless. He really should just turn around and go back to his room. Going outside was a mistake.

"Do you...really not like it?" Kaito asks as he gestures towards the puzzle. "Because if you don't then I was serious about letting you leave."

Ryoma and Tenko watch curiously from the grass. It looks like they're currently in the middle of doing a set of sit ups.

"Puzzles are...stupid," Kokichi answers quietly as he turns away to head back inside, keeping his head down as he walks past Kaito.

He notices Kaito's shoulder slump dejectedly and he grits his teeth as he grabs the door handle to head back into the dormitory to go back into his room. What he doesn't expect to see is Angie's ghostly body lying on the floor. Gonta's dangling tied to a pole nearby, his body burnt to an almost unrecognisable crisp. He doesn't know if his exhaustion has finally caught up to him or if it's his

conscience attacking him but he stumbles back, blinking rapidly.

The two bodies aren't there when he looks through the glass once more but just catching a single glimpse of them is enough for him to reluctantly turn back around and snatch the puzzle box from the table. He sits down angrily, ignoring how Kaito is gaping at him with a justifiably surprised expression as he harshly pours all the pieces onto the table and slams pieces together one by one.

He just needs a distraction, that's all. Once he gets this puzzle done then Angie and Gonta will have moved on and he can get to his room without seeing either of them again. He concentrates intensely as he gathers up all of the corner pieces rapidly, building the outside of the puzzle at an alarming speed.

"W-Woah, you're not supposed to be putting the pieces together so quickly!" Kaito tells him as he rushes to sit across from him. "I did one of these during astronaut training and it took me ages to even start it properly-"

"If I wanted to hear your life story then I would've asked you to tell me it," Kokichi snaps as he finishes two sides of the outer puzzle in under a minute. He plays with a piece of puzzle in his hand as he looks over the rest of the pieces like a hawk, pushing all the outer corner pieces he can find to the side.

Kaito hesitates before flicking him a piece over. Kokichi glares at it before slotting it into the right place. "So, um, what made you change your mind?"

Kokichi ignores him as he presses two pieces together a little too forcefully.

God, he's so close to snapping under the pressure of everything. Why did he stupidly take the responsibility of playing the anti-hero? He's gotten himself way too involved with a game he doesn't even want to play in the first place. This isn't fun at all. Games are supposed to bring joy and cause competition. A game where you're forced to play against your will is boring and frustrating and it almost brings him to tears thinking about how desperately he just wants to bow out now. He wants to spit his dummy out and flip the game over on its head. He doesn't want to play a game where the rules become pointless. He doesn't want to play a game against someone who *cheats*.

It's almost pathetic how low he's stooping to even get the chance to get one *tiny* victory that's going to mean absolutely nothing to him once he dies and wakes up here again with a blank memory. He shouldn't even have to force people out of their own game to keep it fair but hey, hopefully it'll at least be satisfying to watch Tsumugi realise she's not going to be able to take part in another game ever again.

Maybe the worst part of all of this is how much he has to lie to *himself* that he's doing the right thing. He doubts anyone else would be able to do something so evil as to send innocent people to their deaths. (It's certainly not entertaining catching Angie and Gonta staring at him from the corner of his eye either.)

He should just let someone else sort this mess out. It's not like he cares about anyone here. Hell, he should just try his best to stay alive and leave with Tsumugi so he doesn't have to deal with anymore bullshit. It's such an attractive offer that is practically in reaching distance.

Imagine if he demanded a retrial right now and let Tsumugi be punished. He's so *sick* of her being his problem to deal with. He's had enough of her trying to torment him at every chance she gets, pushing him closer and closer to a metaphorical edge that he's dangling right at the edge of already. Someone else can just deal with her when the next game starts. They can deal with her

bullshit and let him have some peace.

He rests his forehead on his hand as he scans over the remaining puzzle pieces. Kaito has seemingly decided to let him do the puzzle himself. Maybe he's scared that Kokichi might bite his hands off if he touches any of the pieces.

Honestly, Kaito is becoming *boring* now. Teasing him used to be fun, especially when they had both woken up the first time and he actually argued back. Now he's just a human doormat trying his best to please Kokichi into being his friend. It's *pathetic*. Why would he want to become friends with a shoe licker?

He doesn't want Kaito to go easy on him, he doesn't want him to make things easier. He wants someone who is fun, someone who'll fight back when Kokichi challenges them. This version of Kaito, the one who is subdued and trying his best to befriend Kokichi in all the wrong ways *sucks*. He sucks and he's a hypocrite because Kaito has spent the last couple days acting as if everything is okay, that every problem can be fixed with a click of his fingers. He's the sort of person who believes putting a plaster over a stab wound will fix it.

Kokichi practically growls when two pieces he swears belong next to each other don't slot together right. He presses them more harshly together until one piece flips off the table under the pressure and Kokichi stares at it irritably before throwing his other piece next to it.

"Woah, woah, woah!" Kaito rescues the two pieces from the floor and cradles them to his chest. "You can't go around throwing pieces like that! You won't be able to finish the puzzle if you do!"

"*I don't care!*" It's probably the first truthful thing he's said all night. "It's just a stupid, dumb puzzle anyway and there are absolutely no consequences if I don't finish it anyway so who fucking cares if a couple of pieces go missing!"

He realises he's probably getting a little too worked up over a puzzle but if those two stupid pieces would've just fitted together then this wouldn't be happening. He runs his hands down his face, dragging his fingers over the soft skin of his cheeks before resting his head on the table. God, he'd do anything to be able to fall asleep right now and not be haunted by faces of dead people he doesn't even know that well.

He didn't know Gonta or Angie that well so what's the point in getting so worked up over them? It's not his fault that they were at the wrong place at the wrong time. He didn't do anything wrong. He *didn't*.

(He did.)

Someone taps on his shoulder and he lifts his head up, prepared to give whoever the brave idiot is a lecture of their lifetime before he's flipped very carefully onto the grass. He would hardly even call the flip a flip, more so a careful manoeuvre that made sure his side wasn't pulled too much but he still ends up on his back.

Kokichi blinks as Tenko looks down at him with a frown, dusting her hands off as she eyes his side with a worried expression before sighing.

"How does someone feel so light but so heavy at the same time?" Tenko murmurs as her eyebrows press together.

"W-What are you doing?!" Kaito stresses as he puts his hands to his head. "Tojo is going to go insane if she finds out about this!"

"It was just one flip," Tenko says, rolling her eyes. "And Tenko was being extra careful too!"

"But why flip him in the first place?" Ryoma raises an eyebrow.

"It's Tenko's technique," Tenko responds, wringing her hands together. "And Tenko thinks Ouma honestly needs to, well, how does Tenko put this bluntly? Chill out for a second!" She shudders. "Tenko has never felt so much anxiety in all of her life and it wasn't even *her* anxiety to deal with!"

"You're worried about something?" Ryoma asks him curiously.

Kokichi groans and rests his arm over his eyes in an attempt to block everyone out. "Ugh..."

"C'mon, let's get you sat up," Kaito says as he kneels down next to him.

Kokichi jolts his shoulder as Kaito touches it. "*Don't.*"

"Huh? Are you hurt?" Kaito immediately pulls away. "I-I didn't hurt you, did I?"

"Oh who fucking cares about that?!" Kokichi moves his arm to shoot Kaito a glare. "Stop acting so...different!"

Kaito stares at him incredulously. "Dude, what are you on about-"

"You're being all nice!" Kokichi complains. "And it's weird because you're not supposed to be all...all understanding and doting. Why aren't you getting more angry that I'm literally going out of my way to piss you off?"

"Is that what you want? You want me to get pissed off?" Kaito asks as the tone of his voice shifts into something more gruff, something less patient. Yes. *Yes*. That's *exactly* what he wants.

"Hey! Tenko didn't flip you so you could go around starting fights!" Tenko scolds him disapprovingly, putting a hand on her hip. "Tenko thinks you're only trying to start a fight so you can ignore all the other problems you have and that's not healthy-"

"Actually, maybe blowing some steam off might..." Ryoma clears his throat as Tenko shoots him a withered glare. "I'm just saying that it might help. Keeping things bottled up tends to end in a mess so..."

"Oh, so you want me to say what my problem is?" Kokichi asks as he sits himself up.

"Well Tenko thinks you have *several* problems but-"

"My problem is that you," Kokichi says as he jabs a finger towards Kaito, "think I'm *weak*. No, don't you dare deny it, I see you opening your mouth to argue. Shut the *fuck* up and let me speak. You live in some little fantasy world where everyone has their own role to play and you see yourself as this big hero that saves everyone. You force people to admit that they have problems but don't even ask if they want help-"

"That's not true!" Kaito argues. His fist is trembling slightly by his side.

"It is! It fucking is because you're so desperate to distract yourself from the fact we're basically in hell that you'd rather bury your head in the sand than admit that you're scared!"

"Oh, so it's okay for you to do the same thing then?!" Kaito fires back. "Ouma, I've been trying so hard the last couple of days to help you but you keep throwing everything back in my face! Do you

honestly struggle to actually believe that I'm only trying to help you because it's what any decent person would do?"

Kokichi's finger taps impatiently against the ground. "As a matter of fact, yes. Especially in a situation like this!"

"Can Tenko interject?"

"No!" Kaito and Kokichi answer simultaneously. Kaito grits his teeth. "Y'know what Ouma, do you really want to know why I'm trying so hard to be nice to you?"

"Oh, so you're not doing it out of the kindness of your own heart? Who would've guessed!"
Kokichi scowls

Kaito almost turns as purple as his hair before he closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. "Every time I close my fucking eyes all I see is you and me in this...*hangar* and there's blood absolutely everywhere. Sometimes you're crouched on the floor and sometimes you're lying in a hydraulic press. Sometimes the hydraulic press is closed and there's even more blood and you're not there. *You're not there anymore.*"

The fire in his stomach starts to fizzle out. Kokichi stares at Kaito as if he's grown a second head and laughs nervously. "What?"

"It didn't start until recently, until I started spending more time with you," Kaito admits quietly. "When I first woke up here and saw you there wasn't this sudden need to get to know you, you know? Sure, I thought you looked familiar but I felt the same about everyone else too."

"Sounds to me like you're just losing the plot," Kokichi says, turning his head to the side. "Of course you're the sort of person who tries to befriend people because you had a dream about them."

"It *wasn't* a dream!" Kaito insists sharply. "What I keep seeing isn't just a dream."

"Then what else can it be then?" Kokichi rolls his eyes. "Great, just my luck that a crazy person decides that I'm his new obsession."

"Yeah, well, maybe you should go and take a look in the mirror," Kaito retorts. "Because out of everyone here the only person who looks like they're struggling is you."

"Oh, so Momota has decided he's going to start hitting below the belt?" Kokichi sneers. "Well newsflash, spaceman. You're probably going to die here away from your entire family and you'll *never* get the chance to go to space or-"

"*Enough!*" Tenko shouts loudly, stomping her foot on the ground. "This isn't letting off steam, this is just arguing for the sake of arguing! Tenko is sick of listening to you both act like children!"

"What the hell did I do?!" Kaito defensively asks. "*He's* the one who-"

"Shut up!" Tenko stomps her foot again. "Everyone is going to be quiet and let Tenko speak now!"

Ryoma looks away awkwardly. "The floor is all yours."

"Tenko thinks Momota should stop pushing someone when they're clearly not in the right state of mind to be argued with," Tenko says as she looks at Kaito. She then turns her attention to Kokichi. "And Tenko thinks Ouma needs to get some actual rest and find a way to get rid of some of his

stress before he seriously causes himself to have a breakdown."

"I'm nowhere near to--"

"Something serious is bothering you, Tenko *felt* it," Tenko talks over him. "She can still feel it now, this yucky, heavy feeling that makes her bones itch. Tenko understands that you must be feeling terrible right now but that doesn't give you the right to be so awful to people. Momota is only trying to help you and," Tenko frowns, "we could all die at any moment so why are you wasting your time being so stubborn?"

"I don't *need* help--"

"Tenko isn't going to stand around whilst she knows one of her friends is suffering so much," Tenko says. "So either you do something to help yourself for once or Tenko will take matters into her own hands."

Kokichi pulls a face. "And what's that supposed to mean?"

"Continue acting like this and then you'll find out," Tenko says. "But if you keep pushing people away then soon you're going to have no one who will want to fight in your corner anymore, including Tenko. She can understand acting out because of stress but when light teasing turns into cruel bullying, that's when Tenko thinks a line has been crossed."

Tenko sounds so firm and so sure of herself it's almost startling. Kokichi stares at her as she holds out her hand for him to grab so she can help get him up from the floor. He pauses before grabbing it reluctantly, his legs shaking as he stands up.

"I think you both need some space from each other tonight," Tenko says as she makes it obvious she's talking to Kaito and Kokichi by gesturing towards them both. "And tomorrow you're both going to talk to each other like actual adults."

Kokichi clicks his tongue. "And why should I?"

"Because this is your last chance to get off the dark path you're going down," Tenko warns him. Her words alarm him more than they should. "If things don't change now then Tenko thinks things aren't going to end well for you."

She apologises to Ryoma for stopping their training early but he reassures her that it's okay. The tennis player gives Kaito and Kokichi both a curious look before sighing and reaching into his pocket.

"Hey, take this," Ryoma says as he presses a golden key into Kokichi's hand. "Won it at the casino. Listen kid, you honestly look exhausted and if you're not able to sleep in the dormitory for whatever reason then try one of the rooms at the hotel. Sure, the place is kind of weird but I don't think you have the luxury to be picky at the moment."

Kokichi blinks dumbfoundedly at the golden key in his hand. It sparkles almost suspiciously.

Ryoma doesn't wait for a thank you as he gestures for Kaito to follow him into the dormitory. Kokichi watches silently as everyone leaves one by one.

The only people who stick around are Gonta and Angie, who watch him wordlessly in the distance.

Kokichi Ouma - Chapter 2 Part 3

Chapter Notes

This chapter barely scratches the surface of what I wanted it to include somehow. I'm fairly confident the next chapter isn't going to be nearly as long as this one because I'll be focussing more on pushing the plot forward but I felt if I tried to end the chapter 2 segment with this chapter then it would've just been rushed and I absolutely do not want that at all. However, this chapter is also incredibly long, being 22k words long, and I think anything longer would've been too much. Whilst I could've potentially continued writing and split the chapter into two parts, there's literally no appropriate spot in this chapter to stop it so, yeah...

I think I'm having a little bit too much fun writing character interactions but honestly I think they're what makes writing fics so much fun since I get to write character interactions between characters that didn't talk much in the actual game. I swear the next chapter will be a lot more plot focused ahaha, although I'm not saying this chapter isn't plot focused in the first place.

I have read through this chapter a couple times but if there are still any mistakes then I'm sorry :,)

Anyway, thank you so much to anyone who left a comment. Reading them certainly inspires me to write more ahaha.

I hope you all enjoy my writing! Have a nice day!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Monokuma's, quite frankly, mortifying explanation of how the Key of Love works makes Kokichi instantly throw the key onto his desk instead of putting it under his pillow. Even with the promise of a good night's sleep, playing as someone's 'ideal' partner sounds absolutely exhausting itself and Kokichi doesn't plan to help anyone here indulge in their deepest, raunchiest desires.

Hopefully Ryoma was clueless about the key when he gave it to him, otherwise Kokichi will be having some strong words with him. Seriously, he doesn't think he's ever heard something so embarrassing in all of his life. Listening to Monokuma go on about how it's healthy for people his age to be having such dreams...*ugh*, he's cringing thinking about it even now.

He still has the dilemma of getting to sleep however. Even blowing off steam by arguing with Kaito hasn't helped him and now he just feels hollow. He's so fucking tired. His bones ache and the bags under his eyes have bags. He's starting to think there might be another new generation of them forming already too. It's just, how to put it, falling asleep and seeing dead people is really, really jarring. It's not fun. It's not pleasant to be able to see them alive and well in a dream.

Angie and Gonta have done nothing but taunt him and remind him how much he's failed. There's a line between being a good and a bad person, a very obvious one that a lot of people don't tend to cross unless they're feeling particularly dickish. Sure, he wasn't the one who killed Angie but he's just as bad as Tsumugi for keeping her true cause of death hidden from everyone else on purpose.

Lies roll from his tongue as easily as it is to breathe. He can't remember a time when he's ever had to second guess himself. If one lie fails then another one can take its place effortlessly until a web of lies has formed and Kokichi is the spider sitting comfortably in the middle, manipulating the silk of the web to protect him comfortably. This has to be the first time where he's ever had to *doubt* a lie he's told.

Admittedly, he knows he can be a bit of a sore loser when it comes to games. He's always in it to win it no matter what the stakes are. A game can't be fun when there's nothing to gain from it. As long as the game is fair for both players and each participant has something of equal value to gain or lose then Kokichi is down to play anything.

What he *isn't* down to play are games he's forced to play. See, those games are the worst. For one, if someone has to force people to play their game in the first place then it's highly likely that the game is awful and there's a reason why no one wants to play it. Secondly, it means everyone has to lie to themselves to get through the game. Some people convince themselves that the game is fun. Some people believe they have a right to win. Some people tell themselves they don't care if they win.

Some people lie to progress the game forward.

So forgive him for being a little bit bitter for being annoyed that the game he's being forced to play is barely even functioning without Monokuma forcing death threats onto everyone. Actually, what annoys him even more is that some dumb fucking idiot outside of the game managed to cause a glitch so bad that everyone who dies has to replay Monokuma and Tsumugi's silly little game over and over again until they survive and leave. Good job managing to screw up *that* badly.

A big problem he admittedly has is that he's never played a game where the wager was causing despair. Despair is only a feeling, right? He doesn't think he's ever met someone who has been addicted to a single emotion before. He understands some people chase highs but that's nothing unheard of before. How did Tsumugi, a human who is capable of experiencing every emotion under the sun, fall in love with despair? It's unclear whether Tsumugi likes the idea of feeling despair herself or wants everyone around her to feel it.

Ugh, how annoying. Here he is running around in circles like a headless chicken because he's in possibly one of the worst situations he could ever be in. If he takes even one step out of line then he'll die. If he looks at someone funny then he might as well have marked himself for death. If he trusts the wrong people then he knows the kitchen is full of shiny knives that'll be inserted into his back like a dodgy children's game.

He's well aware his back is pressed up against a very inconvenient wall thank you very much. He's in a situation where it's statistically impossible for him to win at the moment. That thought alone is enough for him to grit his teeth. If it was possible he's certain that he could grind his teeth to pearly dust out of sheer frustration.

The mattress sinks as he takes a seat on the edge of his bed. He's been here for how many days now and still hasn't had the chance to sleep in it properly yet? After all, he's had to deal with Kaito inviting him for surprise sleepovers and Kirumi oh so cruelly keeping him in her bed out of concern. Tch, silly Kirumi. He knows her motherly act has to be a facade, no one is this patient, especially in a high pressure situation like this.

He supposes out of the kindness of his heart he won't act too smug when she inevitably snaps and tries to drag everyone down with her. Well, even if she does kill someone Kokichi bets her downfall will be because of how elegantly she does everything. She'll try too hard to cover her murder and because of her perfectionist ways she'll end up being the obvious suspect.

Kokichi sneaks a glance at the busy whiteboards in front of him and narrows his eyes. He really should start another whiteboard for this game too, just so he has more data to work with. He can vaguely remember what was on the whiteboard in the room downstairs (he thinks it was Kaede's room) so he should probably recreate that board too but, ugh, what a hassle. All these pictures and doodles are going to get too complicated at some point and he really doesn't have room for another whiteboard so...

He gets up and flips the whiteboard over so that there's a fresh new side on display and searches his room until he finds headshots of everyone and starts to pin them on the whiteboard. He labels one side of the board as 'killed' and the other side as 'died.' He pins everyone's pictures under both sides and starts to tally. He also makes sure to quickly scrawl the number of games there has been too in the top left corner.

It's certainly not his neatest work but this is clearly the most efficient way to work now. Phew, good thing he's incredibly adaptable! Sure, this way of counting how many times people have died or killed won't show who murdered who but in the long run, Kokichi doubts that factor is going to be important anymore. What's more important is figuring out who is more likely to kill and to influence the game in his favour.

He's well aware he has a couple of anomalies, including the fact Kaede's whiteboard didn't include Gonta, Angie, Tsumugi or Kaito, meaning something wild must've happened. Maybe everyone just died in quick succession of each other and Kaede never had the chance to write down what happened. Well, since they're all here it's safe to assume they died but there's no clear category to put them in and whilst Kokichi can just guess, it doesn't really affect his whiteboard too much so he doesn't bother.

So far, the top people to avoid are Kirumi and Tsumugi for very obvious reasons. Kirumi has killed in every game she's been in so far and Tsumugi is Tsumugi and that reason alone is more than enough to explain why she should be avoided. He supposes Miu is a candidate to be ignored based solely on the fact she killed him during the last game apparently, the rotten cow. She's lucky he has too many other things to worry about right now because it's oh so tempting to find her right now and tear her a new one because she somehow managed to kill him during a previous game.

Still, he would hardly call her a threat right now. Sure, she knows he took her secret but since her ego is apparently the size of the entire fucking planet, he's confident that she's not going to let it spill that he's fooled everyone.

What's probably the most concerning issue he has at the moment is what happens *now*. He's already accepted that he needs Tsumugi to win the game so she can leave but in order for her to win then people have to die and Kokichi isn't about to stoop low enough to encourage someone to murder. But, well, shit, the only other option is to wait and...hope that a murder happens soon and that's...*really* not a good alternative.

He runs his hands down his face with a groan, tugging at the bottom of his eyes and pulling the skin as he flops back onto his bed. He really didn't think this far ahead but he's also sacrificed too much already to just give up now. Wow, he's really done it this time, huh? He's all but forced himself between a rock and a hard place and now he's dealing with the consequences.

Somehow, this is Tsumugi's fault. It's so much easier to just blame everything on her. If she hadn't stabbed him that night then he would be feeling much more with it right now. If she hadn't interfered and just let everyone die then he would've just woken up here again but blissfully unaware of all the horrors awaiting him.

Gonta stares at him from the corner of his eye and he lets out another pitiful groan. "For fucks sake,

leave me alone.”

He’s gone by the time Kokichi blinks but he can still feel his presence. He knows Gonta or Angie aren’t following him around like ghosts, he knows that it’s just his imagination playing cruel tricks but, fuck, sometimes it really does feel like they’re both watching him from somewhere he can’t see. He doesn’t have time for this, he doesn’t have the energy to deal with something as ridiculous as guilt on top of everything else.

Gonta and Angie, they’ll just have to understand that he’s going to get them justice in a different way. He can’t get them out this time but once Tsumugi is out of the picture then...then things will be better. They have to be better. He’s gambled too much for things to fail now. As long as Tsumugi doesn’t get wind of his plan then everything will be okay. Everything has to be okay because if everything isn’t okay then...

He rests his arm over his eyes since the harsh white lighting of his bedroom starts to irritate them. God, he’d do almost anything for a *second* of sleep right now. Using the Key of Love is still out of the question but if Monokuma asked him to cut every strand of glass to the same length using only children’s safety scissors then he would do it if it means he can close his eyes without having to be haunted by people who aren’t here anymore.

His wound throbs as an annoying reminder that his body tragically isn’t magic and needs some rest before it really does just do something dramatic like force him to rest by ceasing to work. Also known as passing out. Also known as the most embarrassing thing any person can do, especially in public.

...surely nothing bad will happen if he closes his eyes for just five minutes, right? He’s not stupid, he knows he can’t keep going on like this. He’s running on empty and is dangerously close to snapping. If he can have just five minutes of sleep then that’ll fix everything. All he has to do is close his eyes and...pray that his mind is so exhausted that it doesn’t dream.

Kokichi closes his eyes and falls asleep almost instantly.

—

Something grabs him.

His eyes snap open at the same time he throws a fist blindly at whatever is holding him. He hits something solid and then hears a muffled cry of anguish. Kokichi slowly blinks as the world starts to piece together around him like a buffering video game.

“Ow, that hurt!”

“Hah?”

He rubs his eyes quickly, hoping that’ll help speed up the whole waking up process. Wow, his hands feel very cold, although that isn’t a bad thing since they feel somewhat refreshing against his skin. Kokichi blinks once more as he gets a much clearer view of what’s around him. He’s outside near, hmm, that’s Miu’s lab, right? He’s standing near the large door that’s nearby, tall and unfortunately locked.

“W-Why’d you hit me?!”

Kokichi raises a brow as he cocks his head to the side and spots Kiibo rubbing his nose as if Kokichi somehow managed to make it bleed. Geez, talk about being dramatic. “What are you on about? I think I would remember if I hit you or not, Kiiboy.”

“You *did!*” Kiibo insists gloomily, a small pout on his face. “All I was doing was trying to help!”

“Help?” Kokichi looks around with a puzzled expression. “Hey, what am I doing outside? Did you try to kidnap me, Kiiboy? How rude!”

“I was helping Iruma inside her lab when we spotted you stumbling around outside!” Kiibo retorts with a frown. “I know it’s late but Iruma really wanted my help with something so we both decided to stay up a little later than we usually do when all of a sudden we saw you walking around outside her lab! You kept tripping over your feet so I thought you were hurt but I don’t see any visible injuries...”

Oh. *Oh*. He was *sleepwalking*. He was sleepwalking and both Miu and Kiibo saw him make a fool of himself. Lovely. “Psh, I was just having a little midnight stroll, that’s all.”

“In the middle of the night and with no shoes on?” Kiibo asks dubiously. “And why did you ignore me when I called for you? I shouted at you plenty of times but you didn’t respond! Have I done something to offend you?”

“Yeah, exist,” Kokichi oh so nicely answers whilst Kiibo huffs like a riled up chicken.

“You don’t have to be so cruel!” Kiibo crosses his arms with a huff. “I regret even coming out to see if you were okay. There’s clearly nothing wrong with you if you’re insulting me for no reason at all.”

Kokichi rolls his eyes along with his shoulders, wincing when he hears them pop and crack.

“Yeah, yeah, keep your antenna on. I’m going back to bed anyway.”

Kiibo stops him. “But why were you out here in the first place? I don’t want to doubt anyone here but you know...” Kiibo lowers his voice. “Are you sure you want to be walking around alone when, well, anything could happen to you? I’m not saying that anyone here is particularly dangerous but...”

“As if someone could hurt me,” Kokichi says a little too confidently for someone with a stab wound. Even Kiibo looks at him with a look someone would give to a child who is clearly telling fibs.

“Okay, yeah, sure,” Kiibo responds before he rolls his eyes. “Also, there’s something else I want to ask you.”

“Then spit it out already! Geez...” Kokichi sighs.

“I’m really starting to think you’re actually robophobic,” Kiibo mutters before pressing his fingers together nervously. “So, um, I heard you talking to, well, Angie and Gonta.” Kiibo hesitates before lifting his head up to meet his eyes. “Why?”

“Huh, did Iruma drop something on your head?” Kokichi tilts his head to the side ever so slightly. “Why on earth would I be talking to either of them? They’re both dead, you know?”

“Of course I know that,” Kiibo argues defensively, crossing his arms to his chest. “But you were the one who was talking to them! I’m confident that’s what I heard when I got closer to you! Is that why you were ignoring me? So you could talk to them instead?”

“How can I talk to people who are dead, Kiiboy?” Kokichi rubs his chin. “How to explain to a dumb robot that once a human is dead then there’s no way to talk to them. Hmm...”

“I’m not a dumb robot!” Kiibo clearly has his priorities straight as he bristles tightly. “And I’m well aware that dead people can’t speak! That’s why I’m worried about the fact you were talking to them-”

“Are you making up stories, Kiiboy?” Kokichi asks. “Telling little white lies? Because I’d know if I-”

“I heard you tell them both to leave you alone!” Kiibo shouts over him before his eyes go wide with embarrassment. “M-My apologies, I didn’t mean to shout so loud but you wouldn’t let me finish what I was saying.”

“Oh, so now you’re victim blaming?” Kokichi whistles lowly. “Wow, that’s certainly a low blow coming from you.”

“Is everything okay out there, Kiibs?” Kokichi spots Miu poke her head from her lab door, peering around with a mixture of curiosity as well as anxiety. She sneers when she spots him. “Hey, you better not be causing any hassle because I have so much shit in here that’ll knock you flat on your ass.”

“Everything is fine, Iruma. I promise,” Kiibo reassures her.

“Hmph...” Miu flips her hair haughtily as she steps back into her lab with an unimpressed look on her face. “Then keep it down you hapless virgins, some people are trying to get shit done, you know? Not all of us are stupid enough to start sleepwalking around in the middle of a fucking killing game.”

Kiibo’s mouth goes round as Kokichi clicks his tongue quietly, pulling a face when a bright look of realisation takes over Kiibo’s face. “Oh, you were sleepwalking! Everything makes so much sense now!”

“Why didn’t your professor build you with a couple extra brain cells?” Kokichi quips flatly.

“Storage issues,” Kiibo answers seriously before smiling dejectedly. “Oh, I only just realised you’re insulting me, aren’t you?”

“Wow, you learn quickly.”

“Yes, well, I was designed to do that,” Kiibo says with a continued smile of disappointment. “But enough about me-”

“Yes, enough about you! I have a bed I need to jump back into since you rudely kidnapped me in the middle of the night!” Kokichi pouts childishly, shaking a fist at the exasperated robot. “Just you wait until I tell everyone about this! Everyone will avoid you like the plague from now on!”

“Ouma...” Kiibo sounds like an underpaid teacher. “I’m only trying to help, you know? What if I didn’t spot you when I did. You could’ve tripped and seriously hurt yourself.”

“Kiiboy, people don’t tend to sleepwalk on purpose, you know?” Kokichi tells him with a roll of his eyes. “And besides, as clearly established, you kidnapped me so I have no clue where you got this idea from that I’ve been sleepwalking-”

“Both Iruma and I saw you!” Kiibo argues heatedly. “Ouma, it’s like you just said! People don’t sleepwalk without a reason. I may not be a medical expert but I do know that sleepwalking can be caused by stress-”

“When did you decide to become a therapist?” Kokichi attempts to leave but Kiibo blocks him with his body. He scowls. “Oh, so not only did you kidnap me but now you’re holding me hostage too? Seriously, how mean can you get?”

“If you want to go back to your room then fine, I’ll let you,” Kiibo surprisingly says and Kokichi thinks there might be a small glimmer of hope that he might be able to escape this demeaning conversation. “But I’ll walk you there just to make sure you don’t fall back asleep and actually trip on something.”

“I don’t need a babysitter,” Kokichi spits as he juts out his lower lip. “Honestly, Kiiboy. You say such cruel things so innocently.”

“You’re the cruel one, Ouma,” Kiibo easily retorts. “I’m finding it frustrating that you won’t just let me help you. Is it your pride that’s getting in the way? Because I can assure you that I won’t tell anyone about tonight.”

“Oh, so you’re going to pass up on the chance to humiliate me in front of everyone just like that?” Kokichi asks him.

“Ouma, why would I even want to humiliate you?” Kiibo counters with a frown. “Is it so hard to believe that I just want to help you? I know you don’t see me as your friend but I really do care about your wellbeing.”

“No, you’re just trying to lull me into a false sense of security so you can drag me off somewhere to snap my neck,” Kokichi responds. “Don’t think I don’t know what you’re up to, Kiiboy. You’re going to have to try a lot harder than this to catch me off guard!”

“H-How could you even suggest that I’d do such a thing?!” Kiibo stammers as he holds his hands up helplessly. “Of course I don’t want to snap your neck!”

“So it’s not my neck you want to snap-”

“Ouma, I don’t want to hurt you, full stop,” Kiibo tells him with a weary look on his face. “And it’s very hurtful for you to assume otherwise. I really don’t know what I’ve done to make you so hostile towards me and honestly, I’m not sure what to say to reassure you that I’m only trying to help but you have no reason to be so rude to me.”

“Aw, did I hurt the ickle robot’s feelings?” Kokichi smiles tauntingly as he mockingly pats Kiibo on the head. “I’m sowwy, Kiiboy.”

“No you’re not. Don’t say you’re sorry if you don’t mean it,” Kiibo sighs before letting his tense shoulders slump. “I really don’t know why you’re so mean to me in particular but all I want is for the two of us to get along. Ouma, please be honest with me for just a moment. Have I actually done something to offend you?”

“I mean, your oily breath is kind of vile and smells really bad but apart from that…” Kokichi sighs loudly when Kiibo shrinks in on himself a little too much. “Geez, I’m only joking around, Kiiboy. You don’t have to take things so personally.”

“You take teasing way too far,” Kiibo says quietly. “I should’ve stayed inside with Iruma.”

“Then go and see her. The only reason we’re even still talking right now is because you won’t leave me alone,” Kokichi reminds him.

Kiibo looks like he’s contemplating Kokichi’s idea before shaking his head softly. “Even if you are

being unreasonably mean, I am still concerned about you. I consider you my friend whether you like it or not so of course I'm going to worry about you even though I know you'll never worry about me in return."

"Wow, you really are stupid," Kokichi says. "Did your professor not warn you about being careful who you make friends with?"

"He told me I'm smart enough to make my own decisions," Kiibo responds. "And that means I've decided that we're friends because that's what I want."

"And why would I want to be friends with a huge waste of metal?" Kokichi asks.

"See, there you go insulting me again for absolutely no reason!" Kiibo shakes his head disappointedly. "I don't think I've ever met anyone who is as mean as you. I understand that we're in a stressful situation right now but that doesn't mean--"

"Oh we're in a stressful situation alright," Kokichi agrees as his small slither of patience starts to fray rapidly. He grabs Kiibo's shoulders tightly and pulls him a little closer as a dangerous smile starts to grow on his face. "And I'm really not in the mood to deal with people like you right now. I'm serious, Kiiboy. I'm *this* close," he says as he lifts up his fingers, pressing them almost together in Kiibo's face, "to *absolutely* losing my shit so take the hint and leave me alone."

Kiibo blinks as Kokichi pushes him away a little too harshly, causing the robot to stumble. He huffs as Kiibo shoots him a wounded look and rolls his eyes. Stupid Kiibo and his stupid naïve ideals. It's not Kokichi's fault that he just kept on pushing and pushing. It's almost as if everyone here doesn't have any ears. It clearly doesn't matter how many times Kokichi tells everyone to back off, they just don't listen.

"...how can I leave you alone after hearing you say something like that," Kiibo murmurs quietly and the tiny thread that is holding his patience together *snaps*.

"How fucking dense are you? Is your brain broken?" Kokichi presses a finger into Kiibo's chest roughly when the robot gets a little too close. "Is, is everyone here on some sort of mission to try and piss me off?! Seriously, I don't think I've ever met a more idiotic group of people in my entire life! Everyone here thinks they can just push and push and *push* until they get their own way and I'm," Kokichi twists his hands into his hair, "*sick of it!* So for the love of god, use whatever pathetic excuse of a brain that your pea-brained professor gave you and put two and two together. Leave. Me. *Alone.*"

He never imagined a robot could make such a terrified expression. Kiibo is practically quivering on the spot as he takes a shaky step backwards, backing away as if he was a cornered animal. He catches Miu once again watching them apprehensively from her lab door, her gloved hands holding it tightly as if it were a shield.

It takes him a second to realise that he can hear ragged breathing and it takes him even longer to realise that it's coming from him. The instinct to fight, to force his way out of this uncomfortable situation starts to fizzle away slowly. His muscles twitch in confusion as his entire body starts to melt, all of his built up anger dissipating into an exhausted plea for rest, for someone to just listen to him for once.

Having two people stare at him like he's the monster that's been hiding under their bed makes him feel slimy. He sighs loudly, rubbing the palm of his hands roughly into his eyes before letting out a half-hearted laugh. "Hah, look what you both made me do," he jokes unenthusiastically, smiling bitterly before letting his face go slack. The shared bewildered look that Kiibo and Miu are giving

him makes his skin crawl.

Ah shit, this isn't...he doesn't want this. He can lie to himself all he wants but the sting he feels when he notices Kiibo and Miu are still gawping at him with unfiltered fear hurts him a lot more than he ever thought it could. He's no stranger to receiving dirty looks for his cruel words. This isn't his first rodeo, he's pissed off a lot more people than he's ever been nice to because that's the sort of person he is. He ruins everything he touches. He strikes first before anyone can pull the rug from under his feet.

He doesn't like being vulnerable, he doesn't like not being in control. He likes being on top, to be the one who pulls all the strings behind the scenes. He likes a good challenge, a fun challenge. But hell, he *hates* this, he hates this killing game. Every bone and cell and nerve he has is full of the same seething hatred for being put in a situation like this. If someone wants him dead then they can do the mature thing of just killing him themselves instead of doing the cowardly thing of forcing people to kill each other instead.

Neither Kiibo or Miu have moved yet and he's betting it's because they have no clue what he's going to do next. Here he is throwing the world's biggest tantrum in the midst of a killing game all because he wants some sleep. It's pathetic, really. All of this because he isn't strong enough to deal with a couple of dead faces. It's embarrassing. *He's* embarrassing. He's certain Monokuma is probably laughing at him from wherever he's watching him. The worst part of all of this? He realises he's too tired to care anymore.

If Monokuma wants to watch him then fine, he can. Kokichi is done for tonight. He's done. *Finished.* He's lost all of his fucks to give. Every single one of them. They're all gone now.

It's purely instinct that makes him what he says next. Kiibo starts to open his mouth and Kokichi really can't deal with another lecture. He can't. Not tonight. Maybe not even tomorrow. So before Kiibo can even get a word out, Kokichi quickly blurts out, "Kiiboy, I'm so tired. Whatever you have to say can't it just wait? *Please?*"

Maybe the addition of saying please is enough to truly cause Kiibo to malfunction because his jaw drops and it takes him several seconds too long to recover. The robot pauses with a thoughtful expression before he opens his mouth again to say something and Kokichi isn't quick enough to stop him this time.

"You've not been sleeping well because of..." Kiibo hesitates as his eyes flicker over to Miu. Kiibo lowers his voice. "Angie and Gonta, right?"

"Kiibo-

"Because you've been seeing them in your dreams," Kiibo presses. "I actually got a prize from the MonoMono Machine the other day and I think it might be something that could help you."

"...huh?" Kokichi blinks slowly as Kiibo's words slowly sink in. For once he doesn't have anything to say. No smart retorts, no sarcastic quips, not even a question of how Kiibo has something that might help him in the first place.

Kiibo wavers before his metal backbone finally kicks into action. "Ouma, you stay here with Iruma whilst I grab something from my bedroom."

"Hah, you're leaving him alone with me?!" Miu tugs the door a little more firmly against her body. "What if he loses his shit again and tries to kill me?!"

“He won’t,” Kiibo says confidently and Kokichi wonders where the hell said confidence came from. Kiibo dashes off before Miu can start to complain again and Kokichi stares at the running robot’s back dumbfoundedly.

Miu makes a sound that’s a mixture of both a hiss and a whimper as she narrows her eyes at him. “If you try to hurt me then I will scream.”

The inventor swallows heavily as Kokichi tilts his head at her words. Miu pauses before standing up a little straighter.

“Hey, dumbass, are you even listening to me?”

“Not really,” Kokichi admits. He’s not lying for once either. Everything Miu is saying to him at the moment is going through one ear and out the other with zero time to sink in his head.

“Huh.” Miu shuffles awkwardly, stepping outside and wrapping her arms around herself protectively. She has a spanner tightly gripped in her hand. It catches the moonlight every so often. “Not that I care or anything but what the fuck is up with you? I mean, yeah, everything is shit at the moment but you’re the last person I expected to have a breakdown. Outside of my goddamn lab too.”

His brain scrambles for an answer that’ll satisfy both her and himself but no matter how hard he tries, his tongue remains tied. He shrugs, causing Miu to frown as she eyes him uncertainly. He can’t exactly blame her, he’d be wary if someone he hardly knew started to freak out near him too.

“Tch, whatever.” Miu puts a hand to her hip as she starts to wave her spanner around along with her every hand movement. “Like I said, I don’t really care anyway. But I’ve got my eyes on you, you hear me?”

Her threat hardly fazes him. Kokichi nods dismissively and he knows Miu has figured out that he’s clearly not listening. She clicks her tongue loudly and heads back into her lab but Kokichi knows she’s left her door open a little wider than usual so she can keep a tab on him.

He suddenly feels incredibly stupid. Here he is standing outside shoeless and looking like he’s seconds away from bursting into tears. Which he’s not, by the way. The only reason why his eyes sting so much is because Miu smells so bad that he’s seconds away from flatlining. Allegedly.

Kiibo returns eventually with a blue pillow clutched to his chest and Kokichi raises a brow as the robot presses it into his hands. It feels like it’s made out of memory foam. Kokichi gives it an experimental squeeze and watches as his attempt leaves a noticeable handprint.

“Apparently this pillow is supposed to give you good dreams,” Kiibo says, putting his hands up defensively when Kokichi shoots him a dry look. “I’m not lying! Each prize you win comes with a little description, have you not used the MonoMono Machine yet?”

“I don’t want to use things made by Monokuma,” Kokichi admits with a sniff before squeezing the pillow again.

Kiibo pouts. “Well, even though I understand where you’re coming from, I really do think that this pillow might help you. Since I’m a robot I don’t dream so this pillow is no use to me but you clearly need a good night’s sleep so I think you should keep it.”

Kokichi quietly holds the pillow to his chest and ignores the ugly feeling that is manifesting in his chest. He truly can’t understand why Kiibo is still being so nice to him even after he’s been so vile towards him. His throat feels uncomfortably tight and it’s a struggle to keep his face straight.

So, he kills two birds with one stone and starts to bawl a little too childishly, startling Kiibo to the point of nearly falling over as Kokichi makes an award winning performance out of thanking Kiibo for the pillow.

“N-N-No one has ever been this nice to *meeee*,” Kokichi sobs loudly as Kiibo nearly has the pleasure of experiencing whiplash for the first time because of Kokichi’s very sudden switch in moods. “I owe you my *life*, Kiiboy. I’ll follow you forever from now on so I’ll never miss the chance to repay my debt! I promise.”

“Y-You’re not in debt!” Kiibo insists as Kokichi wails loudly. “I already told you that I have no use for the pillow so-”

“You’re so humble too!” Kokichi sniffs, rubbing his eyes with his sleeve. “The most humble robot to ever exist! Who cares if you’re just a pile of scraps, you’re *my* pile of scraps.”

“Is that...” Kiibo helplessly looks around for some sort of support. “I really can’t tell if you’re aware that you’re insulting but complimenting me at the same time.”

“I’m practically confessing my undying love for you!” Kokichi continues noisily, grabbing Kiibo’s arm and holding onto it tightly. He still hasn’t stopped crying but Kiibo is clearly far too baffled to question him about it. “L-Let’s get married, Kiiboy.” Kokichi hears Miu suddenly start to choke inside her lab. “Let’s *elope*.”

“I-I don’t want to get married to you!” Kiibo bluntly protests, a clear look of panic in his eyes as he tries to pull away. “Y-You’re making too big of a deal out of this! I only gave you a pillow!”

“But it’s such a nice pillow and, and,” Kokichi snuffles as he shows Kiibo the pillow with an overly adoring look before promptly stopping with the theatrics. “No, you’re right. It’s only a pillow.”

“Huh?!” Kiibo looks like he’s seconds away from an existential crisis. “But you, you were, why were you...” Kiibo pauses as he visibly struggles to find the right words to say before sighing in reluctant acceptance. “You know what, I don’t even know why I’m surprised.”

“But I’m still going to treasure this pillow forever and ever,” Kokichi says before resting it on Kiibo’s shoulder. “Hold on a second whilst I try it out.”

“I am not a bed!” Kiibo squawks as Kokichi rests his head on the pillow. It’s soft and twists to cushion his head comfortably. “Do *not* fall asleep on me!”

Kokichi, who is one to not be told what to do, decides that he’ll do the exact opposite of what Kiibo wants. “Too late, Kiiboy, I’m already fast asleep,” he says as he closes his eyes before letting out the most obnoxious snore he can directly into the poor robot’s ear. “I’m *snoooooring*.”

“P-People don’t tend to tell the entire world that they’re snoring when they’re asleep!” Kiibo argues as he visibly struggles over whether to push the small leader off him or not. Unfortunately, Kiibo’s backbone has gone back to being its usual doormat self and the robot groans in defeat as Kokichi proceeds to force Kiibo to carry even more of his weight. “I’m confident that even toddlers behave better than you.”

“Probably,” Kokichi agrees as he plays the dangerous game of keeping his eyes shut on such a luxurious pillow that Kiibo swears will give him sweet dreams.

“Ouma, get off before you actually fall asleep!” Kiibo pushes him half-heartedly. “I-I’m not taking responsibility if you end up falling on the floor!”

“Are you sure about that?” Kokichi cracks an eye open and gives Kiibo a teasing look.

The robot huffs before reluctantly crossing his arms the best as he can whilst dealing with an entire five foot one hindrance by his side. “You’re lucky that I’m more concerned than annoyed at you currently.”

“Aw, Kiiboy really does have a heart,” Kokichi says.

Kiibo sighs loudly as Kokichi unconsciously presses even more of his weight onto Kiibo. The robot rolls his eyes. “Ouma, I’m serious about not taking responsibility if you do fall asleep on me.”

“Hmm, yeah, you keep telling yourself that,” Kokichi murmurs.

“You’re unbelievable, you know that?” Kiibo groans.

Kokichi doesn’t respond and Kiibo smiles bitterly when he realises he has a sleeping leader on his shoulder.

“How’d you even manage to fall asleep standing up?” Kiibo grumbles as he walks him to Miu’s lab carefully, flushing darkly when the inventor ends up laughing at him for allowing himself to get in such a situation in the first place.

—

He wakes up on one of Miu’s velvet couches. Kiibo isn’t in sight but he hears Miu before he even sees her. She’s currently hammering away at something at her desk as she sings obnoxiously to herself. It’s probably a miracle itself that she didn’t wake him up earlier with her pitiful screeching but it turns out Kiibo’s pillow really *is* magic.

It takes him a second to realise someone must’ve thrown a blanket over his body and that instantly causes a pang of guilt to attack him. Even after everything he said last night, even after he was cruel to so many people...

Still, the guilt isn’t enough to stop him from waving gleefully when Miu spots that he’s awake. She pulls her goggles from her eyes and he spots that there’s little red marks on her face from where they’ve been digging in a little too tightly. “Fucking *finally*,” she says and puts a hand on her hip. “Kiibo was convinced he accidentally caused you to go into a coma but I told him that you just needed to catch up on some sleep.”

“Hmm? What time is it?” Kokichi asks curiously.

“Like, almost late afternoon,” Miu answers before pouting. “And I’ve been stuck in here babysitting you this entire time to make sure you didn’t wake up and take any of my shit.”

“Why would I want your garbage?”

“Garbage? *Garbage?!?*” Miu slams her fist proudly against her chest. “I’ll have you know I make the best motherfucking inventions in the goddamn galaxy! Companies have paid millions for some of the shit I’ve made. Even my flops are worth more than you’ll ever make in your lifetime.”

Kokichi rubs the sleep from his eyes as Miu starts to prattle on something he doesn’t particularly care about. He spots her move her arms animatedly as she goes on about contact lenses or something.

He is surprised, however, when she storms over to him and yanks his pillow from under him and throws it onto her desk. “Hey! That’s my pillow!”

“Yeah, well, I want to take a look at it,” Miu says as she pulls down a magnifying glass that’s the size of her head from the wall and starts to adjust it. “I thought Kiibs was bullshitting me when he said it could help people get a good night’s sleep but if *you* managed to almost sleep the entire day away then this pillow must have some sort of mechanism that explains how it works.”

“You’re getting your yucky girl germs all over it!” Kokichi complains as he pushes away the blanket that had pooled around his waist. “And now it’s going to smell like stinky Miu sweat!”

“I do not smell!” Miu snaps as she rotates the pillow around in her hands, giving it a couple of experimental squeezes.

“You reek,” Kokichi insists.

“Fuck you.” Miu pouts as she drops the pillow onto her desk rather carelessly. Kokichi pulls a face. “Well I can’t see anything that explains how it works on the outside so there might be something inside of it that-”

“Don’t dissect my pillow you wench,” Kokichi says as he quickly snatches the pillow to his chest before sticking out his tongue at her. She responds with a tug of her bottom eyelid and a very loud raspberry.

“But you might be holding the secret to creating the best night’s sleep ever,” Miu complains. “If this pillow can cause people to have good dreams then imagine if I was able to make it give people the best goddamn *wet* dream of their life? I’d make *billions*.”

“You’d have to know what a wet dream is like to be able to do that,” Kokichi responds and Miu instantly turns bright red.

“F-Fuck you! I’m the main fucking attraction of every man’s dirtiest dream!” Miu insists heatedly, acting as if she’s not sweating heavily enough to fill an entire pool. “You’re just jealous because I thought of turning the pillow into something much more useful before you!”

“Hey, you can do whatever you want, I’m not judging,” Kokichi says with a shrug. “Just find your own pillow to violate. Mine is off limits.”

“Tch, dickhead,” Miu huffs. “I suppose I could always ask Kiibo to win me one.”

“So you can make an innocent pillow into a sex toy for all the sad, pathetic single people in the world who will never experience seeing an actual naked body in their entire life?” Kokichi asks.

“Talk about being brutal,” Miu says with a low whistle. “I mean, I guess those sorts of people would be my potential target audience.” She pauses before grinning. “So if you’d like to give me your address then I’d happily send you a prototype once I get one finished. On the house.”

“Aw, you’re too kind,” Kokichi responds with two middle fingers.

Miu gladly responds with her own fingers, which are unfortunately longer than his so he makes a big deal out of his thrusting his hands towards her face.

“Oh, by the way,” Miu suddenly says as she finally puts her fingers down. “You owe me big fucking time.”

“Why? For falling asleep in your lab?”

“I mean, yeah, you owe me for that too but I wasn’t talking about that,” Miu responds with this look in her eyes that Kokichi instantly doesn’t like. She’s clearly thinking of ways she can make him do her dirty work for him. “Chabashira of all people asked me where the fuck you were this morning. Like, came to my lab and everything. She was super pissed off because apparently she arranged for you and Momota to suck each other's dicks or something and neither of you turned up.”

“Really?” Kokichi raises an eyebrow.

“Yep!” Miu pops the ‘P’ loudly. “And like, sure, I knew you were here but I’m not a snitch so I told her I had no clue where you were, which you’re welcome for by the way.”

Kokichi raises his brow even higher. “Huh. I totally had you down as the sort of person who would tattle to get their own way.”

“I mean, if it means I get something out of it,” Miu mumbles as she starts to play with her hair. “But I didn’t want you going all psycho on me for dropping you in it so of course I fucking lied.”

Oh. That’s...oddly nice of her. “Wow, I should’ve scared you into submission a lot earlier! Aw man, I’m already mourning all of the potential dirty work I could’ve gotten you to do.”

“Tch, as if I’m scared of you,” Miu grumbles. “You’re the loser who sleepwalks like a weirdo.”

“Ah, but at least I have this amazing pillow,” Kokichi says as he lifts up his pillow and gives it a smug squeeze. “And you don’t.”

“I’m about to insert my foot so far into your ass that you’re gonna become my fucking puppet,” Miu counters with puffed cheeks.

Kokichi snorts before leaning back on the couch with a sigh. “Ugh, the moment I leave this room Chabashira is going to kick my ass and it’s not even my fault I didn’t wake up early enough for her.”

“I mean, if it helps she seemed equally as pissed off at Momota,” Miu offers with a shrug. “Apparently she was banging at his door for a long time before he had the balls to tell her that he wasn’t feeling well. He didn’t even say it to her face either, just through the door. Sounds like to me he just wanted to get out of whatever little dick sucking session you both had planned.”

“Momota is ill?” Kokichi asks curiously. “He seemed okay last night.”

“Maybe the thought of having to spend time with you was a shock to his system,” Miu says.

“*Hah?* I’m an absolute delight to be around,” Kokichi insists. “He probably lied to Chabashira to get her to leave him alone.”

“Yeah, well, he probably shouldn’t go around announcing to the world that he’s ill,” Miu says with a sniff. “Because some fucker might take advantage of that and choke him out whilst he’s weak.”

“Huh...” Kokichi leans back on the couch with a thoughtful expression on his face. “Does that mean you’re thinking of killing him?”

“Of course fucking not you dimwit,” Miu huffs. “Only an idiot would plan a murder out loud. Besides, even if Momota is ill I still wouldn’t want to get on his bad side. He’s built like a damn

tank. Like, sure, if Gonta was still around then I would've put my money on him being the strongest here but have you seen Momota's arms? He'd knock me the fuck out if I went after him."

"Nah, he'd probably invite you to a tea party and make you talk about your feelings," Kokichi tells her.

Miu recoils. "Ew, feelings. I should invent something that just gets rid of them altogether."

"Woah, are you finally going to invent something that is useful?"

"Fucking zip it," Miu snaps as she gestures around her room. "Everything I make is useful! You just don't have the intelligence to realise that you're sitting in a room full of potential treasures."

"Half the stuff in here look like sex toys," Kokichi responds.

"That's because I'm smart enough to make sure everything I make has several uses, duh." Miu rolls her eyes heavily. "What's the point in buying something if it only gets one job done?"

"I feel like I should be more horrified than I actually am," Kokichi admits.

"Oh, so you're admitting that you're impressed with everything I make?" Miu asks smugly.

"Absolutely not," Kokichi says and Miu's smile instantly flips to a frown. "I'm fairly confident that I've caught several different diseases whilst sleeping here and I'm going to send the hospital bill to you once I get out of here and get myself checked over."

"F-Fuck you!" Miu grumbles with a pout. "Not everything I make is raunchy, you know? I have a line of inventions that I created to help people do shit in their sleep. I mean, yeah, it's a work in progress but I'm getting there!"

"Oh, now that certainly doesn't sound boring," Kokichi says as he lifts his head up with intrigue.

"R-Really?" Miu blinks in surprise before clearing her throat loudly. "I-I mean *of course* you're impressed! I never half ass anything I make so everything made by yours truly fucking rules!"

Kokichi watches as Miu stomps around her lab and almost too excitedly shows him everything she's made so far, including a bunch of blueprints she's been drawing up. He raises an eyebrow when she pulls out what seems to be a necklace with some sort of alarm on it. She shows it to him with a grin.

"Guess what this bad boy does?" Miu dangles the necklace from her fingers with an almost taunting grin.

"Hmm? What does it do?"

"It's a lie detector," Miu reveals gleefully. "All you gotta do is slip this fucker onto someone and the little alarm on it will say whether someone is lying or not. If someone is telling a big fat lie then it'll buzz real loud."

"And why on earth did you make it?"

"Because," Miu says as she tucks it into her pocket. "Some asshole here is holding out on us all. Someone knows how to stop the game and they're not doing shit so if they're gonna keep their lips sealed tighter than a virgin's asshole then I'm gonna force some goddamn answers out of them."

"Oh really?" Kokichi dies a little on the inside. "And you're sure it even works?"

“Of course it does!” Miu looks offended at the mere idea of something she’s made not working properly. “Everything I make goes through rigorous testing so I wouldn’t even be showing you this shit if I didn’t think it was any good.”

“I don’t think everyone is going to willingly let you use it on them, you know?” Kokichi warns her. “Besides, what are you going to do anyway? Make everyone wear it one by one until someone cracks?”

“I mean, yeah, *obviously*,” Miu says. “And it’s not like I have that many people to interrogate anyway. After half the group stupidly revealing their secrets yesterday I only have like, a couple of people to badger.”

“And you’re certain your invention actually works?”

“Of course,” Miu answers with a huff.

Well this certainly isn’t awkward. “So…”

“So what?” Miu raises a brow.

“When are you going to start terrorising everyone with your dumb necklace?”

“I-It’s not dumb!” Miu sweats nervously. “A-And it’s gonna benefit everyone! We all want to leave this hellhole so someone has to do something about the lying twat that’s keeping us trapped here! The sooner I start getting answers, the better.”

Well this is certainly something he didn’t predict. He didn’t think Miu of all people would try to take initiative and find a way to leave by herself. Unfortunately for her, she’s not going to get the answers she wants since there’s no way in hell he’s putting that necklace on and she clearly doesn’t suspect him at the moment. He wonders if she’s too scared to accuse him or if she genuinely believed him yesterday when he said Kirumi took his secret.

“So it’s about time you get the fuck out of my lab,” Miu says as she looks at him expectantly.

“Y-You’re seriously throwing me out?” Kokichi’s lip wobbles. “But what if Chabashira spots me and decides to beat me up?!”

“Hey, I’ve already saved your ass once,” Miu responds. “Chabashira isn’t my problem anymore.”

“Tch, meanie.” Kokichi picks up his pillow before making his way to the door.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” Miu says as she waves a hand dismissively, turning her attention back to her desk. “And make sure to close the door on your way out!”

He does not. Miu chucks a wrench at him.

—

He’s minding his own business sipping on tea in the dining room when both Kiibo and Korekiyo decide to jumpscare him for absolutely no reason at all. Kiibo decides to shove his face directly into his line of sight out of nowhere and Kokichi almost chokes on his drink at the sudden movement. Then, he realises that Korekiyo is practically looming over him from behind and he wonders what on earth is actually going on.

“Ouma!” Kiibo cries even after making it painfully obvious he’s in the same room as him. “I think

I've found a way to help you!"

"Kiiboy, what the actual hell are you on about?" Kokichi asks as he puts his cup down.

"Well after what happened last night, I started thinking," Kiibo admits. "Even though you keep denying it, you were talking to Angie and Gonta in your sleep. I couldn't really wrap my head around why you were talking to them since I don't think it's scientifically possible for them to hear what you're saying."

"Okay..." Kokichi would be absolutely thrilled if the ground decided to eat him at this very exact moment. "And?"

"That's where I come in," Korekiyo reveals. "I noticed Kiibo seemed rather confused this morning and that's when he told me about what you were up to last night. Don't look at me like that, I'm not judging you."

"I thought Kiiboy said he wasn't going to tell anyone," Kokichi grumbles.

"I-I didn't tell Shinguji out of spite!" Kiibo insists. "But we both just started talking and he said he has a way to help you!"

"Clearly you're not handling either Angie or Gonta dying very well," Korekiyo says. "And if you're talking to them both whilst you're asleep then clearly you must have things you wish to say to them still, correct? Do you have regrets about both of them dying?"

"Ugh..." Kokichi pushes his tea away as he stands up abruptly. "I don't want to be a part of such a boring conversation."

"Now hold on a second," Korekiyo says as he smoothly blocks the exit with his body. "I'm not judging. However, I think there's something you could help me with and I think it'll benefit you in the long run as well."

"And why would I want to help you exactly?" Kokichi asks.

"Ouma, please listen to what he has to say," Kiibo says almost pleadingly.

He sighs loudly. "Fine."

"Excellent." Korekiyo looks a little too pleased. "Unfortunately, there's no way to revive either of the dead two students as there's no documented attempts that have been successful. However, there *is* a way to talk to them and know that they're both listening."

"You...want to talk to Angie and Gonta?" Kokichi asks flatly. "Well all you have to do is open your mouth and-"

"No, there's another way to talk to them," Korekiyo says. "We can summon their spirits with a séance called The Caged Child."

Kokichi turns to Kiibo to make sure that he's not the only one who thinks Korekiyo is losing the plot but Kiibo looks like he's serious about doing the séance too. The leader laughs awkwardly. "You seriously want to hold a séance? To talk to Gonta and Angie?"

"The Caged Child is a legendary séance," Korekiyo tells him. "Since I have absolutely everything to hold the séance then it would be a waste to not take advantage of the situation. I get to hold my séance and you get some sort of closure."

There's a sparkle in Korekiyo's eye that Kokichi has never noticed before. He must be really excited. "But what if I don't want to do a stupid séance?"

"Taking part in the séance might help you in the long run," Kiibo says. "I don't really understand how seances work but if Shinguji is confident that he's able to summon both Angie and Gonta then wouldn't you like the chance to talk to them again?"

"Not really," Kokichi answers as suddenly finds his fingernails very interesting to look at. "I didn't know either of them very well so it's not like I have anything I want to say to them. If you both want to mess around with spirits then go ahead but I don't particularly care about speaking to either of them."

"Is that so?" Korekiyo rubs his chin. "Even if that is the case, the séance requires five people to work and it would be very helpful in the long run if you joined us anyway."

"Oh, so you want to hold the séance regardless?" Kokichi asks.

Korekiyo nods eagerly. "This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and I'm not going to waste it. Even if you're not interested in talking to either of them, it would be a great help if you joined in anyway. I don't want to waste the entire day looking for people to join."

"Well if you and Kiiboy already want to do it then that's two people already," Kokichi points out. "And I'm pretty sure if you requested Tojo to join you then she would with no questions asked."

"Ouma, I really think you should consider Shinguji's offer more carefully," Kiibo says. "I know what I heard last night and, um, I really think you would benefit greatly from this. Even if you have nothing to say to them then wouldn't hearing that they're both okay help you anyway?"

"And how do you know that they're both okay, Kiiboy?" Kokichi rolls his eyes. "They're dead. They're far from okay."

"Whilst that may be the case," Korekiyo says, "there is also the chance that they've both already found peace with their situation. Angie was a rather eccentric person, yes? I'm sure that if Gonta and Angie's spirits came in contact then there would be no hard feelings between them."

"You say that like you knew them both," Kokichi responds.

"I'm simply saying that if the only reason you don't want to do the séance is because you're scared of what you might hear, I can assure you that most seances go smoothly," Korekiyo explains. "I've been in quite a few seances myself and I can assure you that there's nothing to worry about."

"I'm not scared," Kokichi insists. "I simply think that holding a séance right now is stupid and a little tactless, don't you think?"

"Well that's just your opinion," Korekiyo says. "But I think there's nothing blasphemous about wanting to talk to Angie and Gonta again. If we can summon their spirits and show them both that everyone is okay then they might feel a little better themselves."

"C'mon, Ouma. It's worth a shot, right?" Kiibo has such an earnest look on his face that it makes something twist in Kokichi's stomach. "If you don't want to do it for yourself then at least do it for Angie and Gonta. Let's show them both that thanks to them we're all still alive."

Of course Kiibo says something like *that*. Kokichi sighs loudly. "Fine, fine, I'll help with the dumb séance."

“Really?” Kiibo’s eyes light up happily.

“Excellent,” Korekiyo says, clasping his hands together as the corner of his eyes crinkle. “Now all we need to do is find two more participants and find a dark room to hold the séance in. I’d hold it in my lab but it’s far too bright there.”

“Oh, well, how about we hold it in one of the rooms on the fourth floor?” Kiibo suggests. “You know, those three dark rooms that have nothing inside? I’m not entirely sure what purpose those rooms serve but if we blow the candles out inside of one of the rooms then I’m confident that the room will turn pitch black.”

“What a wonderful idea,” Korekiyo happily agrees. “And since the room is on the same floor as my lab it won’t be as big as a struggle to move all the needed equipment around.”

“But you said you need five people, right?” Kiibo asks.

Korekiyo nods. “That is correct. I’ll leave it up to the two of you to find two more participants whilst I prepare everything upstairs.” He then pauses with a thoughtful look on his face. “I also must admit that it would be for the best if our spiritual medium is a girl.”

“Okay, so we just need to make sure that we ask a girl to join us. Got it!” Kiibo enthusiastically pumps a fist. “Anything else?”

“Perhaps you can both find a stone outside too. A smooth one if possible,” Korekiyo requests. “A stone is needed for the spiritual medium to rest their head on during the séance. Whilst any stone will do, it’ll be nicer for the medium in the long run to have something comfortable to rest on.”

Kiibo nods eagerly. “Right, got it. A smooth stone and at least one girl to join in with us.”

“Why exactly do we need a girl to be the spiritual medium anyway?” Kokichi asks.

“I never said that it was needed for a girl to be the medium,” Korekiyo corrects him, “only that it would be for the best.”

“Yeah but why?”

“Because.” That’s all Korekiyo has to offer before he leaves with a slight spring in his step. It’s almost unsettling to see Korekiyo so fired up about something.

“Okay! Let’s get to it then!” Kiibo excitedly drags him through the second exit of the dining room so that they’re both instantly outside. Kokichi watches idly as Kiibo rushes towards the greenery near the glass wall and starts to pick up stones at random. “Hey, do you think this one will work?”

“That’s far too big, Kiiboy,” Kokichi responds as Kiibo picks up a rock that’s the size of his head.

Kiibo pauses before dropping it on the floor with a thud. “You’re right, no one would be comfortable if they had to rest their head on that.”

“Just look for something that’s...” Kokichi scans the grass. “The size of your palm.”

“Something that’s the size of my palm...” Kiibo scavenges through the grass before letting out a promising yell. He reveals a smooth grey stone that is a little bigger than his palm but is certainly an upgrade from the first stone he picked. “Hey, what about this one?”

“Much better,” Kokichi says. Kiibo whoops happily and heads back over to him, proudly showing

Kokichi his stone despite Kokichi already seeing it.

“Now to find two more people to join in,” Kiibo says. The robot rubs his chin pensively. “I suppose if we asked Tojo then she’d join us regardless but I’d feel a little bad since it feels like asking her is the same as forcing her to join us.”

“I’m confident she won’t care,” Kokichi reassures him. “Besides, what’s the point in having a maid if you don’t get to tell her what to do?”

Kiibo looks scandalised. “T-Tojo is a person, Ouma!”

“I never said she wasn’t a person,” Kokichi responds with a click of his tongue. “Geez, I think your ears are broken.”

“I can assure you that there’s nothing wrong with my hearing,” Kiibo informs him. “Anyway, I think I can see someone so let’s go and ask if they want to join us.”

Kiibo runs off before he can even stop him and Kokichi almost does a one eighty when he realises Kiibo is running directly towards Tsumugi, who is outside for some reason. She has her back turned to the robot but she does turn around when she hears him get closer. Tsumugi looks at Kiibo curiously before her eyes shine mischievously when she spots Kokichi.

“Shirogane! Shirogane! There’s something I’d like to ask you!” Kiibo calls out to her, almost knocking her over as he comes to an abrupt stop. Tsumugi takes a noticeably large step back.

“Hmm? Is there something you want?” Tsumugi asks. She speaks with a soft voice that sounds horribly fake to Kokichi. He wrinkles his nose at her.

Kiibo nods. “Shinguji is holding a séance up on the fourth floor. We’re going to try and get in contact with Angie and Gonta to see if they’re both okay.”

Tsumugi blinks a couple of times before shooting Kokichi a look that screams ‘why on earth would you want to talk to either of them?’ “Oh? And whose idea was this?”

“Shinguji’s of course!” Kiibo answers easily, kindly not mentioning the only reason Korekiyo decided to do the séance in the first place is because of Kokichi. “He said that he needs at least one girl to take part for some reason and whilst Ouma and I plan to also ask Tojo, since you’re here I might as well ask you to join us too since we need five people!”

Tsumugi hums, putting a finger to her lips as she looks to the sky thoughtfully. “I’ve never taken part in a séance before. I always found them quite scary.”

“Well you don’t have to take part if you’re too scared,” Kiibo reassures her. “I just wanted to ask-”

“Oh, no, I wasn’t declining!” Tsumugi tells him and Kokichi grimaces, faking a smile when Kiibo gives him a thumbs up from over his shoulder. “Of course I’ll join in if you need five people! Besides, it’ll be nice to see if Angie and Gonta are doing okay. After all, the way they both died was so brutal...”

Tsumugi trails off with a distant look in her eyes. Kiibo squeezes her shoulder sympathetically. “Don’t worry, Shirogane. Shinguji is confident that we’re going to be able to talk to them both so we should be able to reassure them that everyone is okay.”

“But isn’t that, like, rubbing salt into a wound?” Tsumugi asks. “It almost feels mocking if we tell them that we’re okay whilst they’re dead.”

“I...” Kiibo stammers helplessly. “I-I wasn’t planning to offend them. I just thought the most logical thing to say to them is that their deaths weren’t in vain.”

“Ah, I see.” Tsumugi smiles. “I guess it makes sense when you put it that way. I plainly just want what’s best for everyone.”

Kiibo nods. “Absolutely! I personally don’t understand how seances work myself nor do I really see the appeal of them but if Shinguji thinks we’re able to contact them somehow then I would like to get to talk to them again, even if it is for just a little bit.”

“You’re so considerate, Kiibo,” Tsumugi says and Kiibo starts to beam brightly. “So what time is the séance happening?”

“As soon as possible, I think,” Kiibo tells her. “How about you stick with us whilst we find Tojo. She’s probably our best bet to ask since, um, she doesn’t really tend to say no.”

Tsumugi gives him an understanding nod. “If it helps, the last time I saw her was when she was in her lab. She might even still be up there now since she was doing some ironing.”

“Then let’s head there next,” Kiibo says as he dashes towards the school like an excited kid. Kokichi isn’t sure why Kiibo is so eager to do the séance but there’s something infectious about the robot’s childish excitement.

However, Tsumugi’s presence is enough to make all the hair on his arms stand up as she decides to walk with him, matching his purposefully fast stride effortlessly. He rests his hands behind his head in a vain attempt to look calm and collected.

“Are you seriously participating in a séance to talk to Angie and Gonta of all people?” Tsumugi sounds rather amused.

Kokichi clicks his tongue. “Shinguji practically begged me to join. You know he gets a hard on for this sort of stuff.”

“Hmm, are you sure about that?” Tsumugi clasps her hands down by her waist as she stares ahead with a knowing smile. “Monokuma told me you had quite the freak-out last night and yelled at poor Kiibo. I bet the only reason why you’re doing the séance is because you feel bad for upsetting him.”

“As if,” Kokichi says dismissively. “I just thought doing a séance would be totally *not* boring.”

“Oh, so do you believe in spirits?” Tsumugi asks curiously. “Do you think Angie and Gonta have been here ever since they died, following us around from the afterlife?”

Kokichi shrugs. “If that’s what they want to do with their free time then it doesn’t bother me.” He raises an eyebrow at the cosplayer. “Besides, aren’t you worried that Angie is going to snitch on you?”

Tsumugi laughs. “I’d like to see her try. Of course I’m not worried about her.”

They reach Kirumi’s lab and thankfully catch her in time. She’s currently got a basket full of bedsheets in her hands. She rests the basket on her hip as Kiibo explains the situation to her.

“A séance, you say?” Kirumi puts a hand to her chin as she thinks over her options. “Of course I can join if that’s what you want.”

“I mean, I don’t want to force you to join,” Kiibo mumbles bashfully. “But I thought out of everyone here you might be the most willing to help us so...”

“You don’t have to be embarrassed about requesting my help,” Kirumi reassures him. “And besides, I think it would be nice to be able to see if Gonta and Angie are doing okay. I’m confident that Shinguji knows what he’s doing too so I have no worries about there being any problems.”

Kirumi places the basket onto the table, reassuring the group but mostly herself that she will deal with it later on. Everyone heads to the fourth floor together and Kokichi spots Korekiyo in one of the small rooms drawing a large circle on the floor with what looks to be salt.

“Hmm, are you using salt?” Tsumugi asks. “I always thought that deterred ghosts.”

“I’m using purifying salt,” Korekiyo explains as he finishes the circle. “I always use it since it makes seances more likely to succeed, you see.” He dusts his hands off carefully. “Also, please be wary where you step in here and please do not disturb the circle. If even a grain of salt is out of place then the séance will not work.”

“Wow, I didn’t know things had to be so perfect,” Kiibo murmurs as he anxiously checks where he’s standing.

“Admittedly, it’s the perfectionist in me that would hate to see the circle disturbed in any way,” Korekiyo admits. “But I’m being truthful when I say the séance won’t work if everything isn’t perfect.”

“So how does this work then?” Tsumugi asks. “What do we all need to do?”

“Well firstly, I do need some assistance with carrying some things in here,” Korekiyo says. “There’s a wooden dog statue and a cage that is far too heavy for me to carry alone that still needs to be brought through.”

“Don’t worry, I can help carry those through with you,” Kirumi reassures him.

Korekiyo smiles. “You’re too kind, Tojo.”

“What should we do in the meantime?” Kiibo asks. It’s almost as if he can’t stand still for two seconds.

“There is a song I would like you all to memorise,” Korekiyo says, pulling a book from his pocket. He handles it with such care that it makes Kokichi wonder how badly the anthropologist will react if something happened to it. He taps a page with one of his slender fingers. “Please familiarise yourselves with this song as we’ll need to sing it in order for the séance to work.”

Kokichi reads the title of the song. “The Caged Child’s song, hmm? That doesn’t sound very exciting.”

“That’s because it’s not supposed to be exciting,” Korekiyo tells him with a slight roll of his eyes. “I already know the words since I’ve read the document several times now but it’s important that you all learn the song word by word.”

“It doesn’t look too long so it shouldn’t be too much of a problem,” Kiibo murmurs as Korekiyo passes the book to him.

“Please do be careful with handling the book,” Korekiyo says. “It’s highly valuable but also sadly rather damaged. Please refrain from touching the pages if you can. I’d like to preserve the book as

much as possible.”

“Oh, so what would you do if we accidentally tore a page out?” Kokichi challenges.

Korekiyo’s golden eyes flash dangerously. “I would tear out your nerves.”

“Well shit, I guess Kiibo can hold the book then,” Kokichi says as he takes a dramatic step away from him.

Kiibo’s lips thin anxiously. “W-Why do I have to hold it?!”

“Because your hands are made out of metal,” Korekiyo answers. “So I don’t have to worry about you smudging the book with your hands since you don’t have skin.”

“That’s...” Kiibo pulls a face. “Understandable.”

“I trust that you’re all sensible enough to read whilst Tojo and I sort out a couple of things, yes?” Korekiyo’s mask twitches as he smiles. “And once we’re all ready we can finally hold the legendary séance.”

“I’m starting to think this is less about Angie and Gonta and more about Shinguji wanting to do a séance,” Tsumugi says quietly as Korekiyo and Kirumi leave together.

“Of course he doesn’t have a shit about Gonta or Angie,” Kokichi responds, reading the song carefully. Strangely enough, the words look rather familiar. He wonders if he’s sung this song before. “He cares more about being able to do creepy shit like this.”

“I’m sure he does care,” Kiibo argues weakly. “Besides, he is the Ultimate Anthropologist and he won’t get the chance to do this again once we find a way to leave so who are we to deny him the right to just one séance?”

“When you put it like that...” Tsumugi leans over Kiibo’s shoulder and adjusts her glasses. “It’s kinda hard to read what’s on the paper or is it just me?”

“It’s just you and your horrendous eyesight,” Kokichi reassures her.

Kiibo sighs. “Actually, I’m struggling to read the lyrics too. The handwriting in this book isn’t exactly the neatest.”

Korekiyo and Kirumi return with a cage and then a statue. Kirumi also has a white sheet draped across her arms as she helps haul the metal cage into the room. Whilst Korekiyo grabs the book back from Kiibo, Kirumi carefully shakes the sheet just outside of the room to remove any creases from it.

“Hmm, yes, it seems to still be in the same condition as before,” Korekiyo mumbles to himself as he examines the book. “You all managed to memorise the lyrics properly, correct?”

“I think so,” Kiibo says. “Admittedly it was a little hard to read them but I think I have everything remembered correctly.”

“Same here,” Tsumugi adds with a determined pump of her fists.

“I already knew the lyrics because I’m always a hundred steps ahead of everyone,” Kokichi drawls out as Korekiyo looks at him dryly.

“Please try to take this seriously,” Korekiyo says as Kirumi passes the sheet over to him. “Now,

Tojo and I decided that she should be the spiritual medium. No one here objects to that, right?”

“I don’t see any problem with her being the medium,” Kiibo says. “But does that mean she won’t be able to talk to either Gonta or Angie?”

“I’m afraid not,” Korekiyo answers. “She’ll be acting as a vessel for them to speak through.”

“Whilst I would like to talk to them both, I would rather give you all the chance to be able to speak to them first,” Kirumi says with a slight smile. “And if this séance is successful then I don’t see the harm in doing another one at a later date.”

“Indeed.” Korekiyo looks far too excited at the idea. “Now, Tojo, I need you to kneel in the middle of the circle and rest your head on the stone I’ll be placing on the floor. It’s very important that you don’t speak during this process. Everything has to go perfectly or else we might accidentally release a curse onto the school.”

“I-I didn’t realise seances could be so dangerous,” Tsumugi murmurs nervously. “Are you sure it’s safe for us to be doing this?”

“Of course,” Korekiyo calmly answers. “With me here I doubt anything will go wrong.”

Korekiyo guides her down the salt path he made and places down the stone Kiibo had given him earlier. Kirumi tucks her skirts around her legs carefully as she kneels down, placing her forehead on the centre of the stone.

“Now, I need someone to help me place the cage over her,” Korekiyo instructs.

Kiibo ends up helping Korekiyo lift the cage over to where Kirumi is kneeling. The robot’s arms tremble as the two place the heavy cage over the maid. Kokichi suddenly feels rather uncomfortable seeing Kirumi look so trapped.

Korekiyo must notice his nervous expression as he starts to chuckle. “Please don’t look so alarmed. I can assure you that Tojo is completely safe under there.”

“But she looks so...trapped,” Tsumugi points out quietly. “W-What if the floorboards can’t handle the weight of both the cage and statue? Tojo will get hurt if the floor collapses.”

“The floorboards are a lot stronger than you think,” Korekiyo reassures her before draping the white cloth over the statue. Kokichi watches him intensely as a sickly feeling bubbles inside of him. “Now, Kiibo, please help me put the statue on top of the cage.”

“You want me to lift it that high?!” Kiibo whimpers as his arms continue to shake violently as the two barely manage to haul the statue onto the cage. “T-This thing is a lot heavier than it looks.”

“Well typically four people are supposed to carry it,” Korekiyo admits as the two finally get the statue on top of the cage. “But since Ouma is injured I didn’t want to ask him for help and I honestly thought that you were a lot stronger than you actually are...”

“A-Are you mocking my strength?” Kiibo shrivels into himself.

“I simply thought a robot would’ve been stronger, that’s all.” Korekiyo adjusts his hat. “Now, I want everyone to go to a corner of the room and stand in it. We’ll blow out the candles and I’ll start singing. I want everyone else to follow along with me afterwards.”

“So how is this going to work?” Tsumugi asks as she heads to a random corner. “Are we going to

“speak to them both at the same time or individually?”

“This particular séance only allows us to communicate with one spirit at a time,” Korekiyo explains. “So I’ll first try to communicate with Angie and once we’re done talking with her, we’ll sing the song again and then talk to Gonta.” He closes his eyes. “Now, it’s important that you all don’t say anything after the song and leave the talking to me. Once we’re all sure that it’s Angie that’s talking to us then you’ll all be able to talk to her.”

“But what if Angie doesn’t want to talk to us?” Kokichi asks.

Korekiyo pauses. “There might be a chance that is the case but we’ll worry about that if it happens. Now, are you all ready?”

“Yep!” Kiibo nods before blowing out a candle along with Tsumugi.

Kokichi swallows as the room is swallowed up into darkness. There’s an undeniable feeling of fear that crawls around the room like a lost bug. Whilst he doesn’t really believe in spirits, there is this cold sensation that runs up and down his arms as Korekiyo starts to sing, his voice echoing around the room.

“At last, at last, at long last...”

He sings along quietly, listening as Tsumugi and Kiibo sing along at different pitches. Tsumugi’s voice is much higher than Kiibo’s. The robot’s singing is almost enough to cause his eardrums to burst. Kokichi thought they were trying to encourage Angie and Gonta to talk to them, not scare them both away.

Admittedly, the idea of talking to either Angie or Gonta is actually kind of, well, scary. Say this séance actually does work and Angie and Gonta want to talk then what does he even say? Since Tsumugi is here then Angie might focus her attention on her but what if she also brings up that Kokichi knows about Tsumugi? And what if Gonta is so traumatised by dying in such a brutal manner that he ends up just crying the entire time?

He realises his singing gets quieter and quieter as the song goes on. Korekiyo starts to sing a little louder to make up for his lack of enthusiasm but he can tell by the way Korekiyo’s singing suddenly has more edge to it that the anthropologist wants him to sing a little louder.

“At last, as last, at long last...”

Is it too late to back out now? If he leaves the room then will the school actually become cursed?

“Is the caged child...Angie Yonaga?” Korekiyo asks the darkness.

He quietly taps his foot against the floor as he impatiently waits for an answer. Kirumi isn’t saying anything. *Angie* isn’t saying anything.

“Is the caged child...Angie Yonaga?” Korekiyo repeats himself.

Again, silence. Something must’ve gone wrong.

“Is the caged child...Angie Yonaga?”

“Um, did we do something wrong?” Tsumugi asks quietly.

Korekiyo sighs impatiently. “Shirogane, I made it clear that you weren’t to speak right now.”

“Oh, sorry...”

There’s a brief pause before Korekiyo clears his throat. “Angie should’ve responded by now if she was actually here. Tojo, do you feel any different by any chance?”

Kokichi waits with bated breath for a response. There’s another couple of seconds of silence.

“Are you sure it’s okay for me to talk?” Kirumi asks.

For some reason, it feels like a random weight has been lifted from his shoulders. Kokichi almost lets out a sigh of relief when he hears Kirumi speak.

“I wouldn’t usually ask you to speak but it’s clear the séance isn’t working as planned,” Korekiyo says, sounding rather disappointed. “But you didn’t answer my question. Do you feel any different?”

“Truthfully, no,” Kirumi answers from under the cage.

“I see...” Korekiyo clears his throat. “It seems the séance has failed.”

“Huh? Why?” Kiibo asks. “I’m confident that we did everything right.”

“I don’t know why it’s not working,” Korekiyo admits. “However, there’s no point in us standing around in the dark. Let’s relight the candles and let Tojo out from under the cage.”

Kokichi hears the strike of a match and spots Tsumugi’s face light up under the orange glow of the candle. She starts to carefully lighten up the room whilst Kiibo and Korekiyo remove the statue and cloth from the cage. Kokichi taps his foot impatiently as they both lift the cage up together, only calming down when he sees Kirumi pull herself up and dust her skirts off gently.

“I wonder why it failed,” Korekiyo mumbles to himself with a frown. “We did everything perfectly and I’m sure we all sang the song properly.”

“Maybe...Angie and Gonta aren’t around to talk to us?” Tsumugi suggests.

Korekiyo shakes his head. “No, spirits usually come when summoned. Someone must’ve done something wrong, that’s the only explanation.”

“Well...” Tsumugi clears her throat uncomfortably. “Not to be, um, robophobic but has there ever been a successful séance involving a robot?”

“Are you saying the séance didn’t work because of me?” Kiibo asks nervously, twisting his fingers together.

Korekiyo hums thoughtfully. “Unfortunately, she might be onto something.”

“Huh?!” Kiibo’s face falls. “I-If I had known I wouldn’t have joined in!”

“No, don’t blame yourself,” Korekiyo says. “I should’ve realised sooner that perhaps you shouldn’t be here. Truthfully, I’ve never seen a documented case of there being a séance including a robot. Usually all the participants are human.”

“I-I see...” Kiibo smiles grimly. “I apologise for wasting everyone’s time then.”

“We don’t know if the séance failed because of you,” Korekiyo tells him. “After all, there is another explanation that might explain why Angie didn’t say anything.”

“Hmm? What’s that?” Tsumugi asks.

“Well, perhaps Angie simply just didn’t want to speak to us,” Korekiyo says. “And had nothing she wanted to say.”

He thinks back to his dream where he saw Angie, how her eyes looked like ice as she pushed him from the tower of wax. She practically forced him out of her room, unable to look at him at all.

What...if she didn’t say anything because she’s still angry with him?

The very thought leaves a sour taste in his mouth.

“Perhaps we can try to hold another séance another day,” Korekiyo suggests, although he fails to hide the disappointment in his voice. “We can ask someone to take Kiibo’s place and try to talk to Gonta instead.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” Tsumugi agrees. “Just because we failed today doesn’t mean we can’t try again!”

Korekiyo smiles under his mask. “That is correct. In the meantime I’ll make sure to study this book more closely to make sure that we’re doing everything right.”

Kokichi slips out of the room before he can be dragged into their plans, Korekiyo’s words weighing heavily on his mind. Maybe he’s right, maybe Angie didn’t say anything because she’s still bitter.

He doesn’t blame her.

—

Tenko practically rugby tackles him when she spots him arriving for dinner.

“You *degenerate!*” She drags him into the dining hall by his ear and he complains loudly the entire way. “You *knew* Tenko wanted you and Momota to talk today and you both hid from Tenko like a pair of naughty school children! Seriously, you males are so immature!”

“It’s not my fault you’re bad at finding people,” Kokichi argues, rubbing his sore ear with a pout.

Tenko bristles. “Shut it! Tenko doesn’t want to hear another word from you! She’s still very upset that you spent the entire day avoiding her!”

“As if I’m petty enough to waste my time avoiding you on purpose,” Kokichi says, rolling his eyes. “I hate to break it to you but it seems like you just managed to miss me every time you tried to find me. Sucks to be you.”

Tenko growls. “Tenko is serious when she says she’s very disappointed in you! And Momota too! Geez, she thought at least one of you would be mature enough to start a conversation but clearly you both need your heads knocked together!”

“Why am I getting the brunt of your anger?” Kokichi whines as Tenko scowls at him.

“Because Momota still hasn’t come out of his room yet!” Tenko throws her hands into the air with a look of pure exasperation. “Honestly, Tenko is only trying to help you both and this is what she gets!” She picks up a bowl from the dining table and thrusts it into his hands. “You’re going to march on over to the dormitory and give this to Momota and I don’t want to see you back here for

at least an hour!”

Kokichi pouts as a drop of soup sloshes over the bowl and onto his hand. “Hey, you’re getting my hands dirty!”

“Tenko didn’t ask and doesn’t care!” Tenko plops a spoon into the bowl with a huff. “If Momota is truly ill then this soup might help but if he’s just hiding in his room to avoid talking then tell him Tenko thinks he’s a coward and that she’s going to definitely kick his ass when she sees him next.”

“Okay, duly noted.” Kokichi practically sprints out of the dining room before Tenko can launch even more soup at him. He hears her complain to Kirumi, who sympathetically pats her shoulder.

He supposes he can speedrun a quick conversation with Kaito. He’ll just tell him what he wants to hear and nod along until the astronaut exhausts himself by saying cliché after cliché. Anything to avoid Tenko from throwing him into the sun.

And okay, sure, *maybe* he’s *slightly* in the wrong after yesterday’s argument. However, he’s not going to take responsibility for Kaito’s moronic way of thinking. That’s Kaito’s problem, not his. If Kaito wants to keep his head in the clouds then fine, he can. Kokichi doesn’t care, Kaito is a grown man and can do what he wants.

He knocks on Kaito’s door impatiently. “Oi, Momota. Open up, I brought you dinner.”

Kaito doesn’t open the door. Kokichi sighs and knocks on it a little louder.

“Are you ignoring me? I know how to pick locks, you know? If I break in and see you naked on your bed or something weird like that then that’s on you,” Kokichi calls through the door. He raises a brow when he hears slight movement coming from inside Kaito’s room. However, the astronaut still doesn’t open the door.

“For fucks sake…” Kokichi grumbles to himself as he places the bowl on the floor and kneels down in front of the door, slipping a hairpin from his hair and shoving it into the keyhole. He jiggles it around carefully until he hears a slight click. He sighs as he picks the bowl back up and presses down on the handle. “Seriously, I hope you have your clothes on because I’m coming in, spaceman.”

He nudges the bedroom door open with his shoulder and closes it with his foot, kicking the door firmly shut before stepping into the room. He blinks when he realises that the room is oddly empty and puts the bowl down onto Kaito’s desk with a raised eyebrow. Huh, he could’ve sworn he heard someone in here only seconds ago.

Kaito’s bed is a mess and there’s a bin full of tissues by his bedside so he must’ve been here recently. “Momota? Don’t tell me you’re actually hiding from me.”

He hears a cough that sounds like it came from the bathroom and rolls his eyes. Seriously, if Kaito is actually hiding from him then that’s a new low even for him. Kokichi thought Kaito faced things head on, not cower in the bathroom like a scolded toddler. He pushes open the bathroom door with the promise of an insult heavy on the tip of his tongue when he promptly shuts his mouth when he actually sees Kaito.

The astronaut is pale, *too* pale. The harsh lighting of the bathroom makes the clammy sweat on his forehead stand out even more drastically. Kaito stares at him like a deer caught in the headlights, eyes wide with an unfiltered fear that Kokichi instantly feels secondhand. However, the thing that probably concerns him the most is how Kaito is hunched over the sink with blood dribbling down

his chin, a bloody tissue clenched tightly in a fisted hand.

It takes Kaito a couple of seconds to process that someone has managed to break into his bedroom. Kokichi stares silently, eyes flickering from Kaito's face to the blood on his chin.

"*G-Get out!*" Kaito suddenly yells and lunges forward.

Kokichi yelps as the astronaut pushes him from the bathroom, throwing the tissue onto the floor as he does so. He barely manages to catch himself as Kaito goes to slam the bathroom door shut but is stopped when he starts to cough harshly, his entire body shaking along with each hack. A couple more specks of blood land on Kaito's fist.

For a moment, Kokichi stands uselessly in front of the coughing astronaut, a million and one thoughts running wildly through his head. How the fuck is he supposed to respond to this? Is Kaito dying? Did someone poison him? He's not coughing up too much blood but then again even coughing up the slightest bit isn't healthy. Fuck. Shit. Why did *he* have to find Kaito like this? Why him? He's the last person who is suited to help Kaito right now and clearly the astronaut doesn't want his help either.

But if Kaito really has been poisoned then he has to do something right now to fix it. What has the astronaut eaten today? God, he doesn't know. He doesn't *know*. Miu said that Tenko said that Kaito's been in his room all day and he doesn't see any bowls or plates lying around aside from the one he brought in so maybe he drank something? Yeah, that's more likely.

Okay, okay, so if there's something in his system then he needs to get it *out* of his system, which is going to be a huge fucking problem since Kokichi doesn't know what Kaito has taken or who managed to get Kaito in such a state in the first place. Oh shit, seriously, why did Tenko make him come here?

Kokichi kneels in front of the astronaut and grabs his shoulders, causing Kaito to stare at him incredulously. "W-What the hell are you doing?"

"Checking you over, asshole," Kokichi snaps. "List everything that you've had to eat and drink today. *Now*."

"W-Woah, woah, woah, hold on a second!" Kaito knocks him away a little more gently this time. "Why do you want me to tell you..." Kaito's eyes go wide with realisation. "Aw *hell*. Ouma, I've not been poisoned, okay?"

"You're coughing up blood," Kokichi responds impatiently. "There's clearly something wrong with you and-"

"I'm *ill*," Kaito reveals abruptly and every worry Kokichi has comes to a halt. Kaito seems surprised with himself as his words catch up to him. "Fuck, shit, aw fuck. Pretend you didn't just hear that-"

"You're...ill..." Kokichi echoes slowly before letting his hands slump from Kaito's shoulders.

Kaito hesitates before letting out a defeated sigh. "No one was supposed to find out."

"What the fuck is wrong with you that makes you cough up blood?" Kokichi asks as he barely fights back the urge to wipe the blood from Kaito's face.

"I don't know, okay?" Kaito presses his back heavily against the bathroom door. "No one knows. Not even the doctors can figure out what the hell is wrong with me."

“Oh.” Kokichi uncomfortably clears his throat. “So...”

“Ouma, *please*, just fucking drop it, okay?” He didn’t think Kaito was capable of sounding so desperate. “Seriously, I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Fine, fine...”

The silence that follows after is almost deafening. Kokichi wonders how big of a dick he would be if just left now before things get even more awkward. Clearly Kaito has dealt with coughing up blood before and he obviously doesn’t want him here so...

Kaito coughs again and his entire body shudders along with it. Kokichi watches as Kaito’s hands fly to cover his mouth. Moments later pink blood seeps through the cracks of Kaito’s hands and Kokichi knows if he leaves now then he truly will be nothing more than scum. He’ll help Kaito now and then do the *both* of them a favour by pretending none of this ever happened.

Kokichi hesitates before rubbing Kaito’s back slowly. He feels Kaito flinch when his hand presses against his back carefully but soon Kaito is practically leaning into his touch. He wonders if he’s even helping or not. When the coughing stops, Kokichi pulls his hand away almost instantly.

“Geez, talk about being over dramatic,” Kokichi mumbles as Kaito wipes his mouth with his sleeve once again. The sleeve of the astronaut’s jacket is a much darker purple compared to the rest of his jacket.

Kaito startles before huffing. “Shut up, man.”

“I’m just saying,” Kokichi continues, “if you were that desperate to get out of talking to me then there’s plenty of other ways that doesn’t include hacking up your lungs to escape my presence, you know?”

Kaito lets out a half-hearted snort. “As if I planned all of this.”

“Hmm, I don’t know. Momota has this sneaky feel about him that makes me think all of this was premeditated,” Kokichi responds. “I bet he really didn’t want to deal with Chabashira again so he drank some of Angie’s paint and waited for someone to find him.”

“Ouma...” Kaito sighs tiredly, fumbling with his jacket sleeve so that the blood on it doesn’t rub into his arm. “Look, can we just, ah, pretend that this didn’t happen?”

“Pretend that what happened?” Kokichi asks with a wink.

The astronaut still doesn’t look entirely satisfied as he runs his hands down his face, coating his fingers with sweat and blood. Honestly, Kaito looks like shit. If he wasn’t talking right now then Kokichi would think he was a corpse. “Listen man. Can you just...go?”

“Go? Go where?”

“You know where I want you to go,” Kaito grumbles. “Just...get out of my room and leave me alone, okay?”

“I could but Chabashira will actually murder me if she thinks I ditched you and she’s super scary,” Kokichi says as if that’s actually the reason why he’s staying here. “And besides, Momota looks like he’s about to actually flatline right in front of me, which would be very rude of you by the way, so...”

“Ouma, quit screwing around.” Kaito’s arms and legs both tremble as he tries to pull himself up from the floor. Is he trying to prove a point that he’s okay or something? If so he’s doing a horrible job. “Seriously, I’m not in the mood to deal with...” He stumbles as his hands slip across the wall in a vain attempt to keep himself from falling.

“Ugh, hold on a second, spaceman.” Kokichi grabs Kaito’s arm and hooks it around his shoulder, ignoring Kaito’s squawk of resistance as he pulls himself up from the floor and all but forces Kaito to put as much as his weight as possible onto Kokichi. He stumbles since Kaito is a lot taller and heavier than him but he somehow manages to make it work, even though he knows he can’t hold him for too long.

“W-What are you doing?!” Kaito tries to pull his arm away but Kokichi makes sure to tighten his grip on it.

“Walking you to your bed, dipshit.” Kokichi pulls a face as Kaito takes a second too long to realise that Kokichi is seconds away from dragging him across his bedroom. “Don’t tell me you lost the ability to walk now, hmm?”

“Of course I know how to walk!” Kaito finally starts to co-operate and they both finally start to make some progress. Kokichi rolls his eyes when Kaito starts to lean heavier and heavier on him. The idiot would’ve never been able to get himself to his bed in this state.

Kokichi dusts his hands off in an over dramatic manner once Kaito is sitting heavily on his bed, trembling like a frail leaf on a windy day. “O-kay, that’s one Momota-chan safely put onto his bed! I’ll send you the bill for my help later.”

“I didn’t need your help,” Kaito grumbles like a child. “Could’ve...gotten here by myself.”

“Haha, yeah, sure.” Kokichi dismissively ignores Kaito’s desperate attempt to make himself feel better. “Why don’t I drag you back to your bathroom and you can show me just how capable you are?”

Kaito clicks his tongue loudly before throwing his head to the side with a scowl. “Fuck you, man.”

“Woah, woah, woah! You’re being a little harsh, don’tcha think?” Kokichi raises a brow. “I didn’t have to help you, you know? You just looked so pathetic sprawled out on the floor that even I couldn’t ignore you.”

He’s well aware that he’s pushing the astronaut’s buttons on purpose but if Kaito is going to lie to his face then he thinks he has the right to retort however he wants. He notices Kaito’s jaw tighten and sighs.

“Momota, I’m well aware that none of this,” he says as he gestures the entirety of the astronaut, “is any of my business and quite frankly I don’t want to make it my business either. However, I must ask since it’s honestly baffling me to no end so do me a favour and answer me truthfully, okay? Are you stupid?”

Kaito splutters indignantly. “*What?!*”

“I asked if you’re stupid,” Kokichi says. “Although your response suggests to me that I didn’t actually need to ask in the first place.”

“Are you serious right now?” Kaito grips the edge of his bed tightly and if he didn’t look so pale then Kokichi would’ve thought he was about to lunge at him. “What the *hell* is your problem?”

“Oh, I don’t have a problem but you clearly do,” Kokichi responds. “I mean, sure, I get it. Coughing up blood is kind of embarrassing and you do look stupid right now but isn’t hiding the fact you’re ill from everyone here kind of, well, selfish?”

“How am I being selfish?” Kaito argues. “I just don’t want everyone making a big deal out of-”

“But what if you die and it’s your illness that kills you,” Kokichi says. “And we end up running around like headless chickens trying to figure out your cause of death when the entire time it turns out you were just ill.”

Kaito growls quietly, a grimace on his face as he ducks his head towards the floor. “I-I don’t plan on dying here so of course I never worried about that happening.”

“Oh, so you’re completely fine then?” Kokichi wipes fake sweat from his forehead. “Phew, what a relief! And here I thought coughing up blood isn’t healthy but if Momota thinks he’s going to be okay then that means I have absolutely nothing to worry about!”

“Why you...”

He supposes he is being rather cruel right now. After all, it’s been obvious from the start that Kaito has been trying to distract himself from something by helping others and this is clearly the problem Kaito has been running from. It’s just, out of everything, Kokichi didn’t expect *this*. He just thought Kaito was dumb and was trying to hide from the reality of the killing game, not from an illness that is clearly eating away at his body.

Kaito looks rather pitiful as another layer of sweat replaces the previous one. From how tense his entire body is it’s clear that he’s desperately trying to continue his façade that he’s okay, that he’s not ill. It’s...rather depressing to watch.

It does make Kokichi wonder how Kaito is managing to force his way through each day. If he hadn’t walked in and saw Kaito in such a state then he never would’ve guessed he was ill. Then again, Kaito clearly had no intention of telling anyone here and in a way, Kokichi supposes he can respect that decision. Kaito isn’t as paranoid as Kokichi is but if Kokichi was ill then he definitely wouldn’t have told anyone out of fear of becoming an easy target.

He wonders if it was any other person who was ill then would they have given up by now? After all, the likelihood of surviving this game is slim, especially since there’s only meant to be two survivors. However, Kaito has done nothing but encourage everyone to fight back against Monokuma. It’s obvious that Kaito wants nothing more than to live.

However, staring down at the sickly astronaut makes Kokichi feel ill himself. Kaito doesn’t know that even if he dies now then he’s just going to wake up again and go through the same hell over and over until there’s no players left. He won’t know that he’s going to be trapped in the same loop of suffering until he gets the chance to leave. Kaito doesn’t know a thing and watching him try so hard to survive...it’s...

Kaito coughs again pitifully and Kokichi bites the inside of his mouth as everything suddenly clicks. He’s going to have to watch everyone die one by one until he’s confident he can force Tsumugi out of the game. Angie and Gonta...they were just the very beginning. He’s been so sleep deprived over these last couple days that it didn’t hit him that he’s going to be surrounded by death. He was so blinded by the idea of stopping the game that...

Ugh, what a *hassle*.

“Instead of getting worked up over nothing, why don’t you lie down?” Kokichi suggests before shoving Kaito’s shoulders down onto the bed. The astronaut blinks before fighting back angrily.

“D-Don’t fucking tell me what to do!” Kaito stubbornly sits back up but doesn’t make any attempt to actually get out of bed. In fact, he doesn’t object when Kokichi throws his blanket over his legs. “Tch...”

“Now you know how I felt when you babied me the other day,” Kokichi teasingly points out as he reaches over the bed for the bowl of soup.

“I didn’t baby you,” Kaito argues with a rough voice. “You just needed someone to look after you, that’s all.”

“Wow, I can’t believe Momo-chan is such a hypocrite!” Kokichi stirs the soup carefully with the spoon. He isn’t sure what flavour it is but the texture seems creamy. “Now, are you going to play nice and eat this soup or am I going to have to force feed it to you? It’s your choice.”

“I’m not hungry,” Kaito mumbles, turning his head to the side.

Kokichi rolls his eyes. “Of course you’re not.” He fills the spoon up with soup and playfully starts to fly it around Kaito’s head. “Here comes the rocket ship! *Nyooooooooom!*”

Kaito looks understandably exasperated as he pushes the spoon into the astronaut’s cheek. “Ouma-”

“Oh no, it looks like there’s been a crash landing!” Kokichi fills up the spoon again and isn’t too surprised when Kaito snatches it away from him along with the bowl. “Hey! If you wanted the soup so badly then you could’ve just asked for it!”

“You were pissing me off.” Kaito grabs a tissue from his bedside table and wipes his cheek clean. “What are you, five?”

“Geez, I was only trying to lighten the mood up,” Kokichi mumbles before smiling again. “Anyway, since Momota is clearly okay and absolutely doesn’t need my help at all I think I should get going. I don’t want to catch whatever space cooties Momo-chan has managed to catch.”

“It’s not infectious,” Kaito quickly argues as Kokichi starts to stand up. “So...don’t worry about catching anything, okay?”

“Oh? But how do you know it’s not going to spread?”

“Because it’s not, okay? It’s...” Kaito chews on his bottom lip before sighing. “It doesn’t work like that. If I thought for one second that I could spread this to other people then do you really think I would be around you all so often?”

“Maybe you’re just hoping to silently infect us all so you can win the killing game?” Kokichi rests his hands behind his head as he sits back down. “Who knows.”

“Why would I...” Kaito shakes his head grimly. “I would *never* stoop that low to survive. If I had to sacrifice you all to get out of here then I’d...”

“Rather die, hmm?”

Kaito shrugs helplessly. “I dunno. I mean, I don’t want to die but I’d never cause anyone else to suffer just to live, you know? Just...look at me. It’s safe to say I know what it’s like to live in fear

of randomly dying one day. I've already had to deal with that feeling for a very long time but everyone else here...god, they must be terrified."

Kokichi can't tell if Kaito is talking to him or himself. He clears his throat uncomfortably as he rests his chin on his fisted hand he has balanced on his leg. "Terrified of what, exactly?"

"Dying, obviously," Kaito says. "Everyone is scared of dying, whether they want to admit it or not."

"Haha, *wow*, this conversation suddenly got very deep," Kokichi points out with an awkward laugh.

Kaito starts to stir his soup slowly, focusing most of his attention on making sure he doesn't allow any of the soup to slip from the bowl. "Yeah, I guess it did..."

He can't tell if Kaito is being more serious because Kokichi accidentally managed to figure out his secret or if he just doesn't care anymore. Maybe the astronaut is so tired that he's forgetting to filter himself? It's a possibility.

The astronaut suddenly has a very contemplating look on his face which makes Kokichi want to retreat, especially when Kaito lifts his head up to look him in the eyes. "What's up, spaceman?"

"I'm just..." Kaito rubs his neck with a tense hand. "Look, I'm sorry for yelling at you earlier, okay? And I'm sorry about last night too." He holds a hand up when Kokichi instantly opens his mouth. "Nope, I'm talking now and you're going to listen. I am sorry for trying to push you when you weren't feeling good yourself but I'm *not* sorry for trying to help you in the first place. I don't see you as weak, Ouma. Fuck, you've got to be one of the most stubborn people I've ever met."

"Why thank you."

"Let me finish." Kaito sighs loudly. "Honestly, you don't know when to shut up, do you? Makes me wonder why I decided to believe in you in the first place."

"Hmm? What does Momota mean by that?" Kokichi asks curiously.

Kaito rolls his eyes a little too smugly after realising he knows something that Kokichi doesn't. The leader narrows his eyes at him. "It means I believe in you, *duh*."

"Yes but what do you actually mean by that?" Kokichi stresses. "Or do you just like saying corny shit that a cartoon superhero would say to make themselves sound cool?"

"Well that's for me to know and for you to figure out," Kaito answers.

Oh real fucking clever, spaceman. Hiding the truth within a challenge Kaito knows he won't back down from because that's the sort of person he is. "Fuck you, spaceman. I could very easily just snap your neck right now if I wanted to."

"Yeah, so why haven't you then?" Kaito asks daringly.

"Because I don't want to get my hands dirty, *duh*." Kokichi pulls a face as he makes a big deal out of wiping his hands on Kaito's blanket. "Also your neck is too thick so it would take me absolutely ages to snap it properly. You'll probably die quicker if I just let you choke on your own blood."

"Hey..." Kaito makes an offended sound. Clearly his illness is a very big sore spot for him.

“Or maybe I’ll save the hassle of killing you myself and order someone else to,” Kokichi continues. “Maybe if I asked Tojo nicely enough and told her I really, really need to leave then she might help me out.”

“Uh huh, you keep telling yourself that.”

Kokichi frowns. “Aren’t you the slightest bit worried?”

“I’ve dealt with the fact I’m going to die sooner rather than later for a while, Ouma. A lot of what you’re saying really doesn’t phase me,” Kaito says. “And like I said, I believe in you so I know you won’t kill me.”

“Well now that you’ve said that I have to prove a point now!” Kokichi sighs. “I’m pretty sure there’s a lab upstairs full of weapons...hmm, how would you like to die, Momo-chan?”

“Like a hero,” Kaito says dreamily. His childish answer, however, does successfully catch Kokichi off guard since he has no clue why Kaito isn’t more scared of him. Why isn’t he threatening to punch him already? If Kaito really knows what it’s like to stare death in the face then why isn’t he going out of his way to stop Kokichi from tormenting everyone else?

“Of course Momota would give such a stupid answer,” Kokichi mutters. “No one dies a hero, Momota. People die and that’s that. In fact, I’m pretty sure people have been dying since the world existed and I don’t remember many people being called a hero when they die.”

“Well dying is the one thing we don’t have control over so if I want to die as a hero then I’ll die as one,” Kaito insists before pumping a fist proudly. “But I don’t plan on dying any time soon so I don’t have to worry about shit like that for a very long time!”

Kokichi swallows as a small lump starts to make itself known in his throat. “In a game like this I don’t think you have much choice about whether you want to live or not. Someone is going to try to kill you eventually.”

“What’s the point in worrying about stuff like that if it hasn’t happened yet?” Kaito counters easily. “If I have time to worry then that means I’m not doing enough to help everyone get out of here! Because that’s the goal, Ouma. I want as many people as possible to leave this game. Monokuma has had more than enough victims already.”

Stupid Kaito, that’s what he wants too but it’s not that simple. Kaito doesn’t know how complicated things are and he doubts he’d be able to handle the truth. Kaito would probably go out of his way to try and befriend Tsumugi and try to get her to change her mind. However, Kokichi knows that isn’t a choice. Tsumugi is desperate for this game. She’s desperate for blood and death and despair.

Forcing her out is the best move and it seems the only way to get her out of the game is to make sure she survives. She hasn’t cottoned on to his plan yet and he hopes she doesn’t but, god, he really has so much riding on this.

“Let me guess, you’re not saying anything because you think I’m stupid? Kaito says, crossing his arms. “Well I’ll have you know that it doesn’t matter how many times I have to try but I *will* find a way out of here! I’m not letting anyone else die under my watch!”

“If that’s the case then you should probably find the person who knows how to start the end of the game,” Kokichi responds quietly. “Aren’t you pissed off that they’re forcing the game to continue?”

“I mean, I’d rather they didn’t but there has to be a reason why they’re keeping so quiet,” Kaito admits. “I honestly have no clue who they might be though. Obviously it’s not you and me since you figured out my secret and you’re...” He awkwardly averts his gaze.

“A virgin?” Apparently.

“Right!” Kaito nods quickly. “Hey, what do you think about them anyway? You know, the person who knows how to end the game?”

“Well it’s like you said, they’re keeping tight lipped for a reason probably,” Kokichi says. “Makes you wonder what they’re planning.”

“Or maybe they’re just scared of revealing the truth,” Kaito suddenly suggests. “As soon as I’m well enough I’m gonna find them and give them a piece of my mind. They can’t let fear hold them back. I don’t know why they’re holding back but it better be for a good damn reason.”

“Maybe they’re just waiting for the right time to strike,” Kokichi responds as he fumbles with the sleeve of his shirt. “Maybe Monokuma only created this motive to try and press their back up against a wall.”

“Well if I was them I’d want to end the game as soon as possible to piss Monokuma off,” Kaito admits. “But I also want to put everyone out of their misery too. I mean, sure, maybe they are waiting for the right time to strike but is it really worth the gamble? If someone dies before they can reveal how to end the game then...”

“That’s on them?”

Kaito shakes his head. “No, it’d be on *Monokuma* obviously. But if they’re holding out for a reason then they shouldn’t keep all their eggs in one basket, you know? If they end up waiting too long then they might lose everything.”

“Huh...” Kokichi blinks slowly as he starts to chew on the nail on his thumb. Maybe Kaito is actually onto something.

“What’s that look in your eye for?” Kaito narrows his eyes. “You’re not planning something, are you?”

“Why would I be planning something? It’s not like I have the hot gossip on how to end the game.” Kokichi snuffles as crocodile tears gather in the corner of his eyes. “I think Momota-chan should just get some rest since he looks like he’s about to keel over and he’s starting to say things that don’t make any sense.”

“I’m fine,” Kaito says even though he looks the exact opposite of fine. “Besides, I need to get ready for training tonight-”

“Woah!” Kokichi raises a judgemental eyebrow. “You really are dumb if you think you’re well enough to train tonight.”

“But-”

“You’re the one who wants to keep your illness a secret, right?” Kokichi gestures to the door. “If you go out there then everyone is going to know that you’re practically on your deathbed. You’re going to keel over and make your problem into someone else’s.”

Kaito looks momentarily offended before crossing his arms with a huff. “W-Well...”

“Forget it, spaceman. You’re not doing shit tonight.” Kokichi gestures to the bowl of soup in his hands. “So eat up and go the fuck to sleep.”

“You’d make a horrendous nurse,” Kaito grumbles irritably before staring down at his bowl with a pinched expression. He looks like he’s about to projectile vomit everywhere.

“Do I seriously have to feed you like a kid?” Kokichi asks.

Kaito shakes his head. “I’m...really not hungry.”

Kokichi takes a moment to look him up and down before sighing. It seems moving Kaito to his bed hasn’t improved his condition, only made him more comfortable perhaps. He still has blood on his face and sweat soaking his skin. Seriously, what sort of person allows themselves to get into this sort of state?

“Ouma, where are you going?” Kaito asks and Kokichi swears he hears a slight edge of worry in Kaito’s voice.

The small leader wordlessly enters the bathroom and quickly finds a flannel cloth on the sink. He runs it under some warm water before heading back into the bedroom, clicking his tongue as Kaito eyes the fabric curiously.

“Silly Momota, not realising how pathetic he looks.” Kokichi keeps a straight face as he wipes the blood and sweat from the astronaut’s face with such care he didn’t know he was capable of. He ignores how his sleeve gets soaked from squeezing the flannel a little too tightly.

Kaito stares at him with a dazed expression before a grin starts to grow on his face. Ugh, what’s got him smiling like that? “I knew I picked the right person to believe in.”

“You must have very low standards if you think someone cleaning your face is revolutionary.” Kokichi pulls away with a frown. “Besides, your face was making me feel nauseous with how disgusting it looked.”

“Yeah, yeah...” Kokichi hates the way Kaito doesn’t sound like he believes him.

“Ugh, it was so much easier to deal with you when you were pissed at me for breaking in,” Kokichi grumbles. “Go back to being annoyed, spaceman. Or better yet, go to sleep so I don’t have to deal with your dumb comments anymore.”

“You know, something tells me you’re lying,” Kaito says a little too teasingly.

“Nope, I absolutely hate your guts right now,” Kokichi insists. “Even when you’re supposed to be dying dramatically from an unknown illness, you still find a way to annoy me. I can’t tell if you’re purposefully trying to get on my bad side or if you’re just a masochist.”

“Maybe I am a masochist,” Kaito says, “but I’m not giving up on you. Especially not now.”

“Especially not now...” Kokichi echoes quietly with a frown. “What the fuck is that supposed to mean, hmm?”

“You say a lot of weird shit that’s honestly downright concerning at times but you still went out of your way to help me tonight even though you literally could’ve just walked away,” Kaito says. “Even after I tried to get you to leave you still stayed. Deep down, I think you actually really care more than you let on.”

“O-kay, I really think the blood loss is starting to make you go crazy,” Kokichi quickly interrupts. He stands up abruptly from the chair that was conveniently by Kaito’s bed. “Since you’re clearly a professional at hacking your lungs up then it’s safe to leave you alone for one night, right? I have a bunch of evil things I need to be doing so-”

“Thank you for looking after me,” Kaito says quietly, nervously rubbing the back of his head as his ears turn red. He lowers his voice even more. “I still don’t plan to tell anyone else about this but you know...if you could keep my illness between you and me then...”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever you want, spaceman.” Kokichi turns his back on him as he heads to the door. “Just try not to choke on your own blood tonight, okay? I’m not going to come running if I hear you dying throughout the night.”

“Whatever you say, Ouma.”

Tch. He can’t tell if he’s more impressed or annoyed that Kaito has managed to get under his skin. He leaves the room without another word.

Kiibo looks a little too pleased when Kokichi asks to talk to him after finding him in Miu’s lab. He has no clue what they’re both up to but apparently Miu has almost finished a blueprint that’ll help upgrade him.

“Um, why have you brought a radio with you?” Kiibo asks as he gestures to the radio Kokichi is carrying under his arm. He got it from the warehouse. “I think it’s a little late to sing together, don’t you think?”

“It’s never too late to sing,” Kokichi says as he drags Kiibo into the school and upstairs towards the room with the grand piano and music sheets all over the floor. “But unfortunately for you, I haven’t invited you along for a little singing session.”

“Then what are we doing here then?” Kiibo asks curiously. “I didn’t know you knew how to play piano.”

“I don’t.” Kokichi finds a random disc from the wall of music and puts it into the CD player that was already in the room. Kiibo watches him with intrigue before pulling a face as Kokichi turns the CD player to its full volume.

“W-What are you doing?!” Kiibo puts his hands to his head as his eyes go wide. “Turn it down!”

He can barely hear Kiibo over the music. Excellent. However, it’s also better to be safe than sorry. He turns on the portable radio he brought with him and also twists the dial on it until the room is filled with the sound of piano playing and random jazz music. He slaps Kiibo’s hands away when the robot tries to turn the radio off.

In hindsight, he probably should’ve reassured Kiibo that he *didn’t* bring him to a secluded part of the school in the middle of the night to murder him. The music certainly doesn’t help either. Kiibo yelps as Kokichi pushes him against the piano and grabs the disc where his ear is supposed to be and starts to twist it quickly, pressing his ear against the robot’s face so he can make out the garbled sounds that Kiibo is making.

Due to the loud music it’s rather hard to hear Kiibo but truthfully that’s a good thing. If Monokuma or Tsumugi are watching him then they’re going to have a very hard time hearing what is going on and the more distance he can put in between them both finding out what he’s up to, the better. He’s

already taken into account that Monokuma, and therefore Tsumugi, already know about Kiibo's audio but as long as they can't hear what he's trying to figure out then that should be okay.

Kiibo stares up at him with a frightful expression and Kokichi supposes he should feel a little more guilty for doing this but he doesn't have the luxury to explain to Kiibo what he's trying to do. Besides, obviously he isn't hurting him so...

He'll apologise to him later but right now he has much more pressing matters to deal with. He doesn't want to admit that Kaito inspired him but something *did* click when Kaito said it would be stupid to put all of his eggs in one basket.

Kokichi slowly twists the dial, raising an eyebrow when he realises just how much audio Kiibo has saved. Then again, Kiibo has at least two games worth of audio saved and that's not including everything he's been recording from this game too. It's a miracle that the robot isn't constantly overheating from how much of his storage has been eaten.

So one thing he couldn't help but notice is how his original whiteboard had Kiibo as someone he hadn't moved yet. He was still included in the group of people who were still alive. That means Kiibo must've lived longer than him and he's hoping that the robot has some sort of clue to help him figure out how the first original game ended.

If he can figure out how to end the game quickly then...then he doesn't have to worry about keeping Tsumugi alive. In fact, if Kiibo's audio reveals a way to get everyone out of here at once then that means Angie and Gonta will be the only two people who will wake up during the next loop and automatically win the game and Kokichi sees that as an absolute *win*.

He won't have to watch everyone die. He won't have to keep watching Angie and Gonta from the corner of his eye.

Kokichi hears something that catches his interest and lets go of the disc. He hears the whir of an engine, perhaps? A jetpack? There's lot of explosions too, as if something was being destroyed. Then it hits him, something *is* being destroyed. Since Kiibo must've still been at the school then he bets that the building Kiibo is destroying is the school itself. He presses his ear more firmly against Kiibo as he listens to the school being broken into pieces and he can't help but think to himself wow, he can't believe he missed Kiibo do something so *cool*.

Then he hears erratic beeping and the sound of glass splintering before there's the loudest explosion yet before the sound of smashing glass. It plays for a couple of seconds before it's abruptly cut off and, oh, *oh*.

That's how Kiibo originally died.

He chews on his bottom lip as he rewinds the audio a little further back to figure out who was still alive at that point. He stops at the end of a class trial. He hears the unmistakable whining of Tsumugi as she complains about something. There's three other voices. One belonging to a male, a childish female voice and another feminine voice that causes him to shudder when he hears it.

Those voices...must've belonged to Shuichi, Maki and Himiko, right? So all three of them including Tsumugi were alive during the end of the original game. That means...Tsumugi must've died when the school was being destroyed. She must've gotten caught up during Kiibo's final act of defiance whilst the other three students survived.

That's why Kiibo was listed as a murderer during the second game. It's because he indirectly killed Tsumugi.

After hearing what he heard he doubts neither Shuichi, Maki or Himiko tried to kill one another to narrow the survivor count down to two so...

The game ended because the school was destroyed? No, that doesn't sound right. Monokuma can add floors to the school as he wishes. So that means...

...the wall need to be destroyed.

God, it makes so much sense now that he thinks about it. Everyone is in a simulation and are trapped in one small area, the glass wall is acting as a barrier between the simulation and whatever is outside of it. Outside of the wall must be some sort of out of bounds area that must force people to wake up from the simulation since the simulation doesn't know what else to do with the player. Almost like...some sort of fail-safe.

If Kiibo took down the walls and Shuichi, Maki and Himiko stepped out of the school and didn't return for a second game then that must mean they woke up from the simulation.

He almost becomes giddy with his findings. He didn't think he'd actually stumble on such a jackpot. He finally lets go of Kiibo and the robot instantly stumbles away from him, cupping his head protectively as his expression screams that he's a little more than confused at the moment. At least he's not running away from him.

Kokichi doesn't stop him this time when he turns the music off from both devices but does shush him when the robot opens his mouth.

"Not a word, Kiiboy," Kokichi says.

"But-"

He doesn't know if Kiibo heard what he heard but if Kiibo starts to blab about hearing the walls blow up then Tsumugi and Monokuma are going to get suspicious. "Kiiboy, I'm serious. Don't say anything."

Kiibo's mouth goes thin as he gives Kokichi an offended look, curling in on himself. "I don't... understand what you're up to."

"Don't worry, you don't need to hurt your pretty little head by thinking too hard," Kokichi reassures him. "Just do me a favour and let's keep what just happened between us, okay? Please, pretty please? Pwetty, pwetty pwease?"

"Okay, okay!" Kiibo is a little too easy to bully into submission. "But can I ask-"

"No." Kokichi shrugs as Kiibo frowns at him. "What did I just say? We're keeping what happened lowkey, okay? Not even Iruma can know about this."

"Why?!"

"Because it's literally a matter of life and death, Kiibaby!" Kokichi grabs the robot's shoulders and spins him out of the room. "Now onwards, Kiiboy! I'm delivering you back to Iruma since I unfortunately don't have time to babysit you and she has a tragically good aim when throwing spanners around."

"W-What's that supposed to mean?!"

It means there's an extra set of eyes watching him whilst Kokichi figures out what to do next. He's

not stupid, he remembers what he heard when him and Kiibo listened to the audio when they first arrived here. As long as Kiibo feigns ignorance for a while and stays with someone then Tsumugi can't touch him. Besides, he doubts knocking down a glass wall is going to take too long, right?

"Don't worry about it," Kokichi says.

Kiibo twists his head to stare at him incredulously. Kokichi smiles brightly at him, as if his creepy smile is enough to reassure the robot that everything is going to be okay.

Understandably, Kiibo only sighs in response but allows Kokichi to haul him all the way back to Miu's lab. She eyes them both suspiciously, narrowing her eyes when Kokichi all but sprints away from her lab before she can throw the closest tool she can reach at him.

Chapter End Notes

me: I want this chapter to be the last chapter of the chapter 2 segment
this chapter: is not the last chapter of the chapter 2 segment

Kokichi Ouma - Chapter 2 Part 4

Chapter Notes

Several things I want to say quickly!!!

First, thank you all so much for 500+ kudos!!! It makes me extremely happy that people are enjoying my writing!!! :)

Second, thank you so much to KiiboTheCinnamonRoll for the fanart!!! It's so funny and good and aaaaaaa it makes me so happy that you took time out of your day to draw something relating to this fic!!! (link is in the comment section of the 21st chapter :))

Third, I wouldn't say this chapter is dark but I would say it's more on the messed up side. Please read with caution!

Hopefully there are no mistakes since I spent hours rereading this over and over but if there are then I'm sorry :,) Now that all of that is out of the way, I'd just like to say I hope you all enjoy my writing!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Predictably, Tsumugi hounds him during breakfast over the loud music.

“What are you up to?” Tsumugi hisses quietly as Kirumi walks past them balancing trays up and down her arms. She leans in a little closer. “You *know* that I know you’re up to something.”

“And it’s absolutely hilarious watching you have a crisis over it,” Kokichi responds with a smug smile, which only grows when Tsumugi narrows her eyes. “Oh relax. As if little old me would do something drastic knowing that you and Monokuma are watching my every movement.”

“If that’s the case then tell me what you were listening to last night,” Tsumugi says. “Unless you really are planning something.”

“Does it look like I’m planning something?” Kokichi raises an eyebrow as he picks up a slice of buttered toast and takes a large bite out of it. “I’m just trying to eat my breakfast and you’re harassing me over nothing.”

“Oh please, don’t act like you’re innocent. It really doesn’t suit you,” Tsumugi huffs.

Kokichi chews on his toast thoughtfully. “What’s the big deal anyway? You're not actually worried about me, are you? I thought you and Monokuma have complete control over the game...or is that what you want us all to believe? Hmm?”

“I just don’t particularly like surprises,” Tsumugi says with an icy glare. “And I have ways of finding out things.”

“Then why don’t you play detective somewhere else and leave me alone?” Kokichi wipes a couple of buttery crumbs onto his plate. “Geez, if I knew you were so easy to wind up then I would’ve started doing more shady shit ages ago.”

“Oh, so you’re admitting you were listening to something shady last night?”

“Well that’s for me to know and for you to find out,” Kokichi says. “Since Shirogane likes to think that she’s some all knowing being, I’m rather confused as to why you’re in such a state right now.” He puts a finger to his cheek. “Unless...Shirogane wasn’t able to listen to what I was listening to?!”

The tips of Tsumugi’s ears turn red. “You purposefully played loud music to drown out what you were listening to. Of course I’m struggling to figure out what you heard last night.”

“Aw man, what a shame!” He lightly puts a hand on her shoulder. “Well, if you do manage to somehow upgrade your hearing then do let me know!”

“Asshole...” Tsumugi scowls behind her cup of tea before plastering a fake smile on her face when Kaito enters the dining room and surprisingly heads straight towards the free chair next to Kokichi. “Ah, good morning, Momota! I hope you’re feeling well!”

“Of course I’m feeling good!” Kaito says as he sits down a little too heavily. “I’ve got no reason to feel bad right now!”

“Hmm...” Kokichi hides his amused expression by sipping on his coffee.

“A-Anyway...” Kaito must’ve noticed his expression as he quickly looks away when their eyes meet. “Glad to see that everyone is okay!”

“You mean you’re glad to see that everyone made it through the night, right?” Kokichi corrects him, placing his cup down onto the table with a grin.

Kaito’s smile wavers. “That’s obviously not what I-”

“Well, um, Ouma does have a point,” Tsumugi hesitantly says. “I’m always secretly relieved when I see that everyone is alive. Although it’s plainly sad that we have to be relieved about that sort of stuff in the first place, isn’t it?”

“Aw man, if only Monokuma could do us all a solid and put an end to the game already!” Kokichi stretches his back like a cat as he readjusts himself on his chair. “That would be very nice of him. Don’t you agree, Shirogane?”

“Mhmm...” Tsumugi nods enthusiastically. “I don’t think he’d do something so kind though.”

“That’s why it’s up to us to not kill each other and find a way out of here!” Kaito pumps one of his fists encouragingly. “You’re right, it is sad that our expectations have been reduced to being excited about seeing everyone alive each morning. We shouldn’t have to hope that no one dies during the night when we wake up!”

“Yet here we are,” Kokichi says with a dramatic sigh, cupping his chin as he rests his elbows onto the table. “Waking up each day and hoping that we don’t wake up as ghosts.”

“G-Ghosts aren’t real so of course we don’t have to worry about shit like that!” Kaito’s face quickly turns drastically pale. “So don’t go around saying such stupid things! O-Only children think ghosts are real.”

“Oh, and Shinguji too!” Tsumugi adds, holding up a finger as she explains. “You weren’t there but Ouma and I helped him hold a séance yesterday! We wanted to try and talk to Angie and Gonta but...” The cosplayer droops as she casts her eyes towards the floor with a disappointed

expression. “Angie didn’t want to speak to us so we didn’t try to talk to Gonta.”

“You did what?!” Kaito’s eyes go so wide that it’s a miracle they don’t pop out of his head. “S-Seriously?!”

“Yes, seriously,” Korekiyo says from across the table. He fiddles with his mask before continuing. “I was hoping we could redo the séance today with different people this time-”

“No thank you!” Kokichi instantly butts in. “If Angie or Gonta wanted to speak to us then they would’ve found a way to contact us by now and absolutely anything sounds better than joining you in a musty dark room again so count me out.”

“Yeah, count me the fuck out too,” Kaito says with a shudder. “My grandparents always told me not to mess with spirits and shit.”

“Well, there is always the chance of accidentally unleashing curses when holding particular seances,” Korekiyo admits before closing his eyes. “I do hope that yesterday’s failure didn’t cause anything bad to happen to the school.”

“I literally don’t think things could get worse right now,” Kokichi reassures him with a scoff. “Unless the séance summoned another Momota-chan for us all to deal with!”

Kaito lightly smacks the back of his head like a grandparent scolding their grandchild. It doesn’t hurt but Kokichi instantly starts to rub his head with a pout. Tsumugi watches the altercation with a giggle. “You’re both like a pair of kids.”

“I don’t act like a kid!” Kaito argues. “Ouma is the childish one around here!”

“No, I’m obviously the attractive one of the group,” Kokichi responds with a roll of his eyes. “And *you’re* the dumb one-”

“Hah?! Do you want to say that again?!” Kaito slams his fists together heatedly.

“I said you’re clearly the dumb one-”

“Momota! Ouma!”

The doors rattle as they hit the walls. Tenko rushes into the room with a scowl whilst Ryoma follows behind with a distant look in his eyes. Clearly he’s had to deal with Tenko for quite some time now. There’s a flash of sympathy in his eyes before he sits down at the table and quickly starts a conversation with Kirumi.

Tenko slams her fists down onto the table from across the two males. “Why did neither of you show up to training last night?! Tenko waited ages for at least one of you to turn up and ended up having to exercise with Hoshi alone!”

“Aw, are you saying you don’t like Hoshi’s company?” Kokichi teases, grinning when Ryoma sighs.

“Actually, Tenko had a great time training with him last night!” Tenko hits the table again. “But she expected you both to turn up at some point and neither of you did! Ugh, Tenko really doesn’t get it! First you both won’t stop arguing with each other and then suddenly you both team up to annoy Tenko!”

“Oh yeah, we both totally planned to skip training last night just to annoy you,” Kokichi says.

“Isn’t that right, Momota?”

“Hell no!” Kaito scratches the side of his face sheepishly. “Honestly, last night was my bad, Chabashira. I, well, still wasn’t feeling good so I decided to give training a miss.”

“And I didn’t come because I was too busy babysitting Momota-chan!” Kokichi adds cheerfully, ducking his head when Kaito swats at him again.

Tenko narrows her eyes before letting out an impatient huff. “Honestly...Tenko really has no idea where all you males find the audacity to be so inconsiderate from.” She pulls a face. “Well, Tenko guesses she was the one who told Ouma to check on Momota but...”

“A heads up would’ve been nice,” Ryoma says. “When neither of you answered when we knocked on your doors last night it really worried us both, you know?”

“Well clearly neither of you were that worried since our bedroom doors are still intact! How inconsiderate!” Kokichi points out with a smile. “You should’ve used Kiibo as a battering ram to break down our doors to make sure that we were okay! Both of us could’ve died!”

“D-Do not reduce me to just some battering ram!” Kiibo fiercely demands. “I am much more than just-”

“Oh great! Everyone is here!”

Kiibo smiles bitterly at the table as Miu enters the room, making her the final student to arrive. She juts her bottom lip out. Kokichi quickly notices the lie detector she had made yesterday dangling from her fingers. Oh? Things are certainly about to get interesting.

“Good morning, Iruma-” Miu shoves her hand into Kirumi’s face as the maid greets her.

“Nope, there’s no time for greetings!” Miu waves the lie detector around wildly and Kokichi watches as it sways from side to side almost hypnotically. “I was going to use this yesterday but I couldn’t find half of you fuckers and I wasn’t about to waste my time running around after you all.”

“Um, what is that?” Tsumugi asks hesitantly. “It’s not, um, some sort of weird...you know... something only you would make, right?”

“Hah, are you mocking me, four eyes?” Miu sneers as she thrusts the lie detector forward. “I made a lie detector, *duh*. Since one of you assholes is holding me back from getting out of here then I’ve created something that’ll force the truth out of you all one way or another.”

“Your lie detector won’t hurt anyone, correct?” Kirumi asks warily, peering at the small device as a crease grows between her brows.

Miu rolls her eyes. “I mean, I wish I made it more extravagant so it would electrocute any poor bastard that dares to lie to the great Miu Iruma! However, with what limited time and resources I was dealing with...” She gives the detector a shake. “This detector is more vanilla than Shirogane’s special commissions she keeps whispering to herself about like a pervy creep.”

“Oh, so you overheard me talking about my commissions, huh?” Tsumugi bashfully murmurs.

“A normal person wouldn’t have even brought them up in the first place!” Kokichi happily tells her.

“I see...” Korekiyo curiously eyes the detector, rubbing his chin. “Well, a lie detector is certainly

one way of forcing the truth out of people.”

“How does it work?” Ryoma asks. He already looks fed up.

“Well you put it on someone and ask them questions,” Miu explains excitedly. “If they’re lying then it’ll beep *real* loud and turn red so everyone will know what a lying little snake they are. If they’re telling the truth then it’ll flash green. I was thinking I could upgrade it so if someone is telling the truth then they’ll be rewarded with a good old-”

“Please do not finish that sentence,” Kirumi quickly demands.

Miu flushes. “What’s your problem? Prude bitch...”

“So, um, are you just going to make everyone wear it until you hear what you want?” Tsumugi asks before wringing her hands together nervously. “It’s just, ah, I don’t know if I’m comfortable with wearing something you made-”

“Hah?!” Miu thumps her chest with a clenched fist with an extremely pissed off look on her face. “What’s that supposed to mean?! Are you saying you don’t trust my work?! Fuck you! At least I make things that’ll actually help the world. All you do is play dress up like a dumb baby-”

“Cosplay is *not* dumb!” Tsumugi snaps loudly. Her outburst causes everyone in the room to reel back. Clearly no one expected such a strong reaction from someone who presents themselves as sweet and timid.

Miu snuffles as she stumbles backwards with watery eyes. “W-What the hell...”

Tsumugi’s cheeks turn dark red as she desperately tries to hide her face in her hands. “Ah, I’m sorry! Please forgive me, Iruma! I-I didn’t mean to snap at you!”

“Y-Yeah right...” Miu hands tremble around the lace that is holding the lie detector together.

“Woah, that was totally uncalled for!” Kokichi bounces his fists up and down. It seems that he’s the only person who wasn’t completely startled by Tsumugi’s sudden outburst. “You’re so mean, Shirogane!”

“H-Hold on a second!” Tsumugi desperately looks around the room. “I-”

“Calm down. He’s just teasing you,” Ryoma reassures her.

“I certainly am not!” Kokichi responds as he hardens his expression. “I am clearly establishing that Shirogane is a big meanie who needs to sit on the naughty step and think about her actions!”

“Which step is the naughty step?” Tenko ponders out loud before shaking her head. “Wait, that doesn’t matter!”

“Indeed. What’s more important is Iruma’s lie detector,” Korekiyo says with a chuckle. “Kukuku, I wonder what sort of dark secrets are going to be revealed?”

“We will not use the lie detector to cause people distress,” Kirumi responds with a pointed glare. “In fact, I’m doubtful about even using it in the first place. The secrets Monokuma gave us are a motive and we’ll be playing right into his hands if we allow an argument to-”

“Oh shut up already!” Miu is already acting like her usually haughty self once again. She places the lie detector onto the maid, making sure the lace is snug around Kirumi’s neck. “Fuck trying to

keep everyone happy. It's just a waste of time! We're doing things my way now since I refuse to stay in this shithole for another fucking second, okay?!"

Kirumi blinks before clearing her throat. "Very well then."

"Finally, some damn fucking respect," Miu grumbles before placing her hands on her hips. "Okay, clean freak, are you the bitch who knows how to start the end of the game?"

"No, I don't know how to end the game," Kirumi answers, keeping her expression neutral as the lie detector doesn't do anything for a moment. Then, it flashes a bright green against the maid's chest.

Miu deflates ever so slightly. "Oh."

"It almost sounds like you wanted Tojo to be guilty of lying," Korekiyo states as Kirumi hands the lie detector back to the inventor.

"Well it would've been more convenient," Miu admits through gritted teeth.

"It's like I told you all when we read out the secrets," Kirumi says. "I worked for a dangerous person for money."

"Hah, yeah right," Miu scoffs dismissively. "Whatever you say."

Miu hungrily looks around for her next victim, skipping over Ryoma and Tenko since they both already shared their secrets. She happily places herself behind Kiibo, draping the lie detector carefully around his neck as the robot lets out a panicked yelp. "I-Iruma-"

"I mean, of course I don't fucking doubt you Kiibs but fair is fair," Miu says as she takes a step back. "Go on, prove to everyone that you have no clue how to end this killing game!"

"I, um..." Kiibo fiddles with his fingers as he anxiously stares down at his lap. "Well, I, ah, I don't know how to end the game-"

Buzz!

Kokichi snaps his head towards Kiibo with wide eyes, completely missing how Tsumugi copies him with an unreadable expression. Kiibo yelps at the loud noise, scrambling to pull the lie detector from his neck as Miu looks down at him with a dumbfounded expression.

"T-There must be some sort of mistake!" Kiibo insists as he drops the detector onto the table as if it burnt him. "I really don't know anything about ending the game! M-My secret doesn't involve anything about the situation we're in!"

"Then how come the lie detector buzzed, hmm?" Korekiyo quizzes. "I saw it turn red with my very own eyes."

"Tenko did too," Tenko admits nervously.

"Well clearly Iruma's dumb lie detector doesn't work then!" Kokichi quickly snatches it up and holds it to his chest. "Don't worry, Kiiboy. I believe you."

Miu's face scrunches up. "Hah, are you saying my detector doesn't fucking work?! Of course it does you stupid prick-"

"Maybe it's just faulty?" Kokichi suggests as he slips it on, allowing the small device to hit his chest. He leans back on his chair with an easy smile. "Go on, ask me if I know how to end the

killing game.”

“Well, do you know how to end it?” Miu asks dubiously.

“Nope!”

Buzz!

The inventor narrows her eyes as a puzzled expression takes over her face. “...hah?”

“Didn’t think two people had the same secret,” Ryoma says with a low voice. “Unless Ouma really is right and Iruma’s invention is faulty.”

“Oh, I’m confident it’s faulty!” Kokichi pulls the detector from his neck and unceremoniously places it on Tsumugi. “Hey, hey, Shirogane! You totally don’t know how to end the game, riiight?”

“O-Of course I don’t know how to end it!” Tsumugi instinctively argues before slapping her hand over her mouth.

Buzz!

Tenko pulls a face. “Tenko is starting to think that maybe Iruma’s lie detector really isn’t working properly.”

“B-But everything I make is perfect!” Miu snatches the lie detector from Tsumugi’s neck a little too harshly, causing the cosplayer to fall into the table. She barely manages to catch herself with her palms as Miu hugs her invention to her chest protectively. “T-There must be some sort of conspiracy going on!”

“But I really don’t know how to end the game!” Kiibo stands up abruptly from his chair. “Iruma, you’ve got to believe me!”

“And me too!” Kokichi snuffles as his eyes go watery. “You’ve clearly made a lie detector that tells lies instead of the truth!”

“No I fucking didn’t!” Miu huffs, stomping her feet heatedly. “How dare you even suggest that something made by yours truly doesn’t work! The only thing that doesn’t work around here is your dumb brain!”

“A-Are you suggesting I’m dumb too then?” Tsumugi asks sadly. “Because your lie detector said I was lying too...”

“I’d like to think that three people aren’t hiding such an important secret,” Ryoma admits quietly before tugging on his hat to hide how dead his eyes look. “But then again...”

“I am not a liar!” Kiibo’s entire body bristles. “I understand how precious human life is and vowed from the moment I was brought into this world to never harm a person ever! If I knew how to get out of here then I would’ve helped everyone evacuate days ago!”

Korekiyo smiles from under his mask. “Kukuku, I’ve never heard someone say something with so much conviction before.”

“But...” Miu scrunches her face up helplessly. “I’ve never made something before that hasn’t worked properly!”

“Well there’s always a first time for everything,” Korekiyo tells her.

“Oh fuck off, Shinguji,” Miu mutters. She tightens her hold on the detector before clicking her tongue. “You know what, fuck this! If you all want to hide shit from me then fine. Just don’t come asking me for any favours any time soon because you all clearly care more about looking out for yourselves than each other!”

Kiibo grabs Miu’s hand as she attempts to storm out of the room. “Iruma! I promise that I really don’t know how to end the game! Please, just calm down and-”

“You can fuck off too, Kiibo,” Miu murmurs before snatching her hand away. “I thought we were friends.”

“We are-”

“Then why are you keeping me trapped here, huh?” Miu glares at him from over her shoulder. “If we were actually friends then you wouldn’t be forcing me to stay in such a hellish place. Seriously, fuck you.”

“Hey, there’s no need to be like that!” Kaito calls after her. She holds a middle finger up at him as she walks away, her heeled boots clacking against the floor loudly as she makes her exit. “H-Hey! There was no need for that either!”

“Leave her,” Ryoma says before shaking his head with a tired sigh.

“Kiibo, are you okay?” Kirumi asks gently, placing a gloved hand on the robot’s shoulder sympathetically. “Iruma is just stressed out at the moment. I don’t think she’s truly upset with you but rather with the situation we’re all in.”

The robot’s shoulders slump before he answers with a quiet voice. “I’m fine, Tojo. Thank you for asking.” He casts his eyes to the floor. “I’m...I’m more upset that Iruma didn’t find the answers she was looking for more than anything. I wish that I had some sort of explanation as to why her lie detector isn’t working properly.”

“She, um, did mention that she did have limited resources to work with,” Tsumugi brings up, wringing her hands together. “It is possible that her detector is just missing something?”

“I say we just leave her be,” Korekiyo says. “She’s clearly in a foul mood.”

“That doesn’t mean she has the right to talk to people so horribly,” Kaito says with a frown. “I’m tempted to give her a piece of my mind for-”

“Momota, leave her alone.” Kokichi rests his hands behind his head. “If you go after her now then she’s only going to bite your head off.”

“...tch.” Kaito doesn’t seem too pleased at the thought of sitting still but he thankfully doesn’t stand up. “I’m still going to have a word with her next time I see her. I mean, clearly there’s something wrong with her invention, right? You, Shirogane and Kiibo obviously have nothing to hide so Iruma should just accept that her lie detector isn’t working right.”

“Besides, I’m basically a human lie detector!” Kokichi’s eyes sparkle as he grins proudly. “So if anyone tells a lie then I’d be able to tell straight away!”

“If that’s the case then does that mean you know which one of us is hiding such a big secret from everyone?” Korekiyo asks. “After all, each and every one of us has at some point said that

everything is going to be okay or has said they think we're going to escape here. Clearly those two statements are more likely to be fanciful lies at this point rather than truths."

Kokichi shrugs. "I said I'm a human lie detector, not God."

"I advise that we put an end to this discussion," Kirumi says with a frown. "As previously mentioned, we don't know why someone is hiding such a big secret from us all but if they don't want to say anything then that's their choice and we need to accept that."

"Oh, I have already come to terms with accepting that we're not leaving any time soon," Kokreiyo admits.

"At least sound a little more concerned," Ryoma grumbles under his breath.

"I should've put my foot down about letting Iruma use her lie detector," Kirumi sighs wistfully, her jaw tightening along with the grip on the tray she's holding. "My apologies, everyone. I hope none of you are feeling too distressed right now."

"Hey, if anyone should be apologising it's Iruma!" Kaito quickly argues. "Her actions are her own. You didn't do anything wrong!"

"Even so..." Kirumi grimaces. "I fear that this motive is going to be a lot trickier to deal with than I anticipated. Perhaps reading all the secrets out was a mistake."

Tenko uncomfortably presses her fingers together. "But it's not like we can just pretend we didn't hear them either."

"It's interesting how quickly some of you have begun to regret sharing secrets," Korekiyo says as he absentmindedly plays with a strand of his silky hair. "It's almost as if you've all forgotten that every action always has a consequence."

"You say that but despite such a damning secret be revealed, we're all still alive," Ryoma points out.

"That's right!" Kaito pumps a fist. "Monokuma probably thought we'd be at each other's throats by now but we're all still cooperating with each other! His stupid little motive hasn't worked on us!"

"Yet," Korekiyo says.

"Dude, stop saying shit like that," Kaito grumbles.

"I'm just saying it as it is," Korekiyo responds calmly. "We might all be okay with turning a blind eye for now but sooner or later there's going to be a lot of resentment towards the person who is keeping us here. We all hate Monokuma for keeping us trapped here and I personally think the person who isn't putting an end to the game is going to end up in the same league as him if they don't speak up soon."

"Well there must be a reason why they're keeping so quiet!" Kaito insists. "Whoever they are, I believe in them!"

"Will you continue to believe in them if another murder occurs?" Korekiyo asks with a tilt of his head. He closes his eyes. "Someone in this very room has the opportunity to save us all yet they're choosing to keep silent. I doubt the reason why they're keeping quiet is ever going to be enough to justify their choice."

“Unfortunately I don’t agree with what you’re saying,” Kirumi says. “I don’t want to doubt anyone here and I refuse to believe that someone in this room wants this killing game to continue for malicious reasons.”

“Maybe...they’re waiting for the right moment to strike?” Tenko suggests. “Tenko’s master always told her to observe before striking.”

“We also don’t know everything about the situation we’re in yet,” Ryoma adds. He sneaks a glance over at Kokichi, who raises an eyebrow curiously. “Besides, we’re also forgetting the fact that Monokuma knows that someone knows how to end the game. They’re probably under constant surveillance that’s preventing them from stopping the game already.”

“I think we’re all under constant surveillance,” Tsumugi says before taking a deep breath in through her nose. “But you do have a point. It’s plainly obvious that Monokuma is always going to be one step ahead of everyone. I personally feel bad for the person with the game ending secret. They know how to start the end of the game yet Monokuma will probably stop them if they even try since he’s always watching.”

“Then let’s kill Monokuma!” Kokichi enthusiastically suggests.

“Don’t be so stupid,” Ryoma sighs. “Did you forget that it’s against the rules to hurt him?”

Kokichi hums. “The rules said any violence towards Monokuma is strictly prohibited. If we kill him in one hit then there’s no violence involved!”

Kirumi shakes her head exasperatedly. “I’m fairly confident that killing Monokuma is considered an act of violence.”

“Well if he’s dead then we don’t have to worry about him punishing us, duh,” Kokichi responds.

“We already tried getting rid of him during the time limit,” Tenko reminds him. “He’s too good at hide and seek to properly get the chance to attack him!”

“I’m surprised Monokuma hasn’t come to tell us off yet for even discussing killing him,” Tsumugi timidly mumbles.

“Besides, we shouldn’t even consider hurting him as an option anyway,” Kiibo suddenly says. “We can’t get out of killing by killing, even if it is Monokuma who we will be disposing of.”

“Aw, are you defending him because he’s also a robot?” Kokichi coos.

Kiibo shakes his head. “No, I’m simply stating that the moment we even think about murdering to escape then Monokuma will have already won. He wants us to kill each other and he’s already the cause of two casualties. Angie and Gonta should be a reminder that we need to avoid violence at all cost.”

“That’s exactly what I was going to say!” Kaito agrees instantly. “Besides, we’ll be letting Monokuma off too easily if he dies a swift death!”

“T-That wasn’t the angle I was going for...” Kiibo stammers before puffing his cheeks out. “Besides...I...”

“Hmm, is something wrong?” Tsumugi asks.

Kiibo hesitates for a moment before answering. “No. I simply think that there must be a way out of

here that doesn't involve violence."

"Is that so?" Korekiyo rubs his chin. "Actually, Iruma's lie detector did beep when you claimed you didn't know how to leave. Say, do you actually have a plan that you think will grant us all freedom?"

"I..." Kiibo suddenly looks disappointed. "I do think Iruma's lie detector isn't working properly so I unfortunately don't have any sort of plan to get us all out of here. However, I'd like to think that we'll all figure something out soon."

"I agree," Kirumi says. "However, we're not going to be able to think properly if we all have empty stomachs. Please, let's drop this conversation for now and enjoy a pleasant meal with each other."

Kokichi slumps down into his chair as everyone quickly follows Kirumi's orders and starts to dig in. He watches Kiibo awkwardly stare at the table silently. He blinks when Kiibo then lifts his head up and looks at him with a hard to decipher expression. However, there is something Kokichi can take away from the look in Kiibo's eyes and that is that the robot wants to talk to him about something.

He can also feel Tsumugi's stare burning into the side of his head too. It seems Kiibo isn't the only person who wants to talk to him.

—

Someone rings his doorbell when he's about to leave his bedroom. Kokichi raises an eyebrow curiously as he puts down the hairbrush he had just been using and peers through the peephole, pouting when he spots Kiibo waiting outside of his door with a grim expression on his face.

Ugh, he didn't expect the robot to come after him so quickly. He opens the door slightly, prepared to bully Kiibo into leaving when Kiibo takes him by surprise and all but forces his way into Kokichi's bedroom.

"H-Hey, you can't just barge in like you own the place!" Kokichi stammers as he pushes against Kiibo's chest. "I know you're just a robot but even you should know how manners work!"

It feels like his heart is about to leap from his chest as Kiibo determinedly pushes his way into the room, closing the door behind him as Kokichi continues to furiously tries to force Kiibo out of his room, his feet skidding on the floor over and over as he tries to not trip himself up. He had no clue Kiibo could be so stubborn.

Kiibo frowns at him before blinking slowly when he notices how messy his room is. He eyes one of the whiteboards with a confused expression before shaking his head. "I don't think I even want to know what you've been writing."

"Good, because I don't plan to tell you anyway!" Kokichi grunts as he continues to push. "Take the hint, Kiiboy. I don't want you in here!"

"That's tough because I want to talk to you and you *will* listen." Kiibo's words take him by surprise. He didn't think Kiibo had the ability to sound so strict. "You at least owe it to me to listen to what I have to say after what you did to me last night."

"What, did I hurt your robotic feelings?" Kokichi mockingly teases. "Grow up, Kiiboy. I don't owe you shit—"

“Then consider this as me collecting my favour for giving you that pillow I won,” Kiibo says and Kokichi abruptly closes his mouth. “I recall you saying that you even owed your life to me and quite frankly, I don’t want to have to deal with you following me around for as long as you live so I’m considering this as my payment.”

“...what do you want, Kiibo?”

“To talk,” Kiibo answers, his eyes following Kokichi’s hands as they drop from the robot’s chest. “I want to talk and I want you to take me seriously.”

“Hmm, I don’t know about that...” Kokichi finds a new sudden fascination with his fingernails and starts to check them as Kiibo sighs impatiently.

“Well, even if you don’t take me seriously I still want you to listen, okay?” Kiibo compromises. Geez, he really should stop being such a pushover. “I *hate* that I had to lie this morning, Ouma. I know without a doubt that Iruma’s lie detector was working perfectly fine during breakfast. After all, it accused you, me and Shirogane of lying and I’m confident that the lie detector wasn’t wrong.”

“I didn’t ask you to lie this morning, Kiibo-”

“You *did*,” Kiibo instantly argues. “Last night you made it perfectly clear that I wasn’t to mention the audio you forced me to play and...” His face pinches as if he’s in pain. “Because of your request I couldn’t reassure Iruma this morning that her lie detector was working perfectly fine.”

Something flutters in his chest. Kiibo...really took his request seriously, huh? “So you’re upset that Iruma thinks her inventions suck? I hate to break it to you, Kiiboy, but she already has a big enough ego as it is. I think letting her think she isn’t entirely perfect is a good thing personally.”

“T-That isn’t the issue though!” Kiibo grabs his shoulders with a frantic look in his eyes. “Ouma, I heard everything last night and I really didn’t like what I heard. I heard myself...I heard myself die! Do you know how hard that is?”

He remembers the first time he accidentally made Kiibo listen to himself die, when it was just him and Kiibo innocently listening through the robot’s audio for clues after they had just woken up. He was well aware that he was probably going to hear Kiibo die again for a second time last night but sometimes sacrifices have to be made and he was hoping that the music would’ve made it so that Kiibo wouldn’t have been able to hear his audio. Clearly Kiibo is a lot more advanced than he thought he was.

“How do you know about my audio recording function anyway?” Kiibo asks, allowing his hands to fall from Kokichi’s shoulders so he can instead pace back and forth. “Actually, no, how did you know to listen to it in the first place? How do you know that we’ve clearly been here before? Y-You wouldn’t have listened to my audio otherwise, right?”

“Hmm, so you figured out this isn’t our first time here, huh?” Kokichi mumbles more so to himself. “Honestly, Kiiboy, I was sort of hoping the music would’ve made it so you couldn’t hear anything last night.”

“Ouma, just how much do you know exactly?” Kiibo pauses his pacing to stare at the small leader with a furrowed brow. “Actually, answer me this first. You lied about your secret, didn’t you? You’re actually the person who knows how to start the end of the game, right?”

“What? No, of course I’m not!” Kokichi lies, drooping when Kiibo narrows his eyes. He sighs.

“Okay, you got me! I’m *totally* the person who knows how to end the game!”

“I knew it,” Kiibo murmurs before raising his voice. “But what confuses me is why you listened to my audio last night. The secrets were revealed during the day, meaning you already knew a way to end the game before you dragged me into the music room.”

“Geez, when did you become so observant?” Kokichi teases before clicking his tongue a couple of times as he thinks. “Hmm, how to tell you what I know without getting myself into trouble...”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

Kokichi raises an eyebrow. “You are aware that Monokuma is listening to us at all times, right?”

“Wait, he *is*?!”

“I’ve changed my mind, you really aren’t all that observant after all,” Kokichi says.

Kiibo’s cheeks turn dark red. “I-It never occurred to me that he’s always listening! Although I suppose now that you mention it, it’s been obvious from the start that he’s always listening. But wait, what’s that got to do with this situation?”

“Because, Kiiboy.” Kokichi holds up a finger as he explains, plastering a strict expression on his face. “Monokuma knows that I know a way to end the game. However, I doubt he’s going to make it easy for me to actually kickstart the end of the game so of course I had to figure out another way to end the game, a way that Monokuma isn’t aware of.”

“I see. So that’s why you played loud music whilst listening to my audio.” Kiibo puts a hand to his chin. Then, his eyes go wide as a realisation hits him. “Oh, that’s why you don’t want me repeating what we both heard last night! If Monokuma is listening in on our conversation then that means he’ll find out your new way of ending the game!”

“Wow, it took you that long to realise?” Kokichi teases. There is a good natured smile tugging on his lips however.

“But wait...how come the lie detector buzzed when you put it on Shirogane?” Kiibo asks before the corner of his lips turn downwards. “Does it have to do with, um, you know, what she said on the audio last night?”

Kokichi sucks in a sharp breath and Kiibo freezes.

“Did I, ah, say too much?” Kiibo wrings his hands nervously.

“Say, what do you think about Shirogane?” Kokichi asks, taking the robot by surprise.

“Well, um...” Kiibo pauses before answering him with a grimace. “She’s not a good person, is she? She...wants this game as much as Monokuma does, right?”

“Ah, so you figured that out too,” Kokichi says. “That’s...”

“I-I’m not in danger, am I?” Kiibo suddenly sounds a little more than worried. “Neither Monokuma or Shirogane will come after me, right? The rules make it so Monokuma can’t directly hurt us and Shirogane won’t risk coming after us since I presume she wants to watch the game until the very end...right?”

He’s starting to very quickly regret listening to Kiibo’s audio last night, even if he did find out

something useful. Kiibo starts to panic when he doesn't respond, even going as far as to grab his shoulders once more.

"O-Ouma, everything is going to be okay, *right?*" Kiibo asks. "You've clearly known more than the rest of us for a while, correct? Neither Monokuma or Shirogane have tried to punish you because of that, right?"

"Psh, of course not," Kokichi lies and knocks Kiibo's hands away. "I didn't know robots had the ability to be so paranoid!"

"I'm *concerned*, not paranoid!" Kiibo insists. "And what's worrying me even more is that, well, I'm not sure how you're going to go ahead with, um, you know..." Kiibo struggles before gesturing to Kokichi's bedroom wall with his eyes for a split second. "From what it sounds like, I was the one who...well...you know what I'm getting at, right? I don't have any sort of functions that make it so I'm capable of, hnnng, it's so hard to talk without giving myself away."

"Don't worry, Kiiboy. I totally get what you were trying to say," Kokichi says. "And are you sure you don't have any super secret hidden features that turn you into a complete badass?"

"I'm more than certain," Kiibo answers. "I heard myself flying last night and I know for a fact I have never flown in my life."

"Then that must mean...you were upgraded during a previous game then," Kokichi mumbles, slipping back into his habit of talking to himself when he ends up realising something. "Hmm, I wonder how and who helped you become something that isn't completely useless."

"I'll let that insult slide since we have more pressing matters to be worried about," Kiibo grumbles with a pout. "I wonder if...maybe Iruma was involved."

"Iruma? It's a possibility," Kokichi says. "Hey, does she have anything in her lab that looks like it could be attached to you?"

Kiibo shakes his head sadly. "No. She's shown me absolutely everything that her lab has to offer and I don't recall there being anything that could be used to upgrade me at all."

"Well, that just means we'll have to ask Iruma to find a way to upgrade you then-"

"A-Absolutely not!" Kiibo suddenly argues. "Ouma, as much as I want to help everyone escape, I don't wish to die!"

Kokichi blinks before the implication behind his words finally catches up to him. "Oh. Oh yeah. You would die if we tried to re-enact the end of the first game. Hmm."

"You're making it sound like me dying is just a minor inconvenience!" Kiibo cries with a wounded look on his face.

"At least I'm being nice enough to find a way to remedy the problem!" Kokichi says before rolling his eyes. "Geez, Kiiboy. You're so dramatic!"

"W-Well as grateful as I am, what do we do now then?" Kiibo asks.

"Well that's clearly something for me to worry about by myself," Kokichi says.

"Wait...you don't want me to help you with...you know?" Kiibo once again gives the wall a quick look. "Ouma, I can't let you-"

“What, work alone?” Kokichi sticks his tongue out at him. “Aw, is Kiiboy worried about me?”

“Of course I am!” Kiibo easily answers. “Not only do you have to worry about Monokuma but Shirogane too! Whilst Monokuma can’t directly cause you any harm, Shirogane can.”

“Are you saying you’re going to keep me safe from Shirogane?” Kokichi asks with a teasing twinkle in his eyes. “I’m not worried about her. If anything, I’m more concerned about her going after *you* than me at the moment.”

“But...she can’t hurt me, right? Because if she does then...” If Kiibo has the ability to swallow then there’s no doubt that the robot would be swallowing down a huge lump in his throat right now. “She wouldn’t be able to play the game until the end because Monokuma would have to punish her if she hurt me.”

“I think you’re relying on the rules a little too much, Kiiboy,” Kokichi says.

Kiibo clearly wasn’t expecting to hear such a harsh truth as he recoils anxiously. “Ouma...maybe we should tell everyone else how to end the game just in case-”

“Nuh uh. Nope. Not happening.” Kokichi waggles his finger disapprovingly. “The longer we can keep both Monokuma and Shirogane in the dark, the better. As it stands I only have one trump card to use against them both at the moment but using it is unfortunately not an option.”

“And what is your trump card?”

Kokichi sighs. “Did you seriously just ask me that?”

“What did I do wrong?! Oh...” Kiibo smiles tightly. “That’s right, Monokuma is always listening.”

“Well, I suppose Monokuma and Shirogane do know what my trump card is...”

Kiibo almost chokes. “Then why did you just scold me?!”

“To test you Kiibo,” Kokichi says. “And you failed drastically. But that was just a lie. I just don’t want to tell you.”

“Do...you not trust me?”

“No, it’s more so...” Kokichi exhales loudly as he tries to conjure up the right words to say. “The less you know, the more convenient it is for me. In fact, the less involved you are with all of this, the better.”

“Wait, are you telling me that I can’t help?!” Kiibo shakes his head firmly. “I absolutely cannot allow that. I want to help no matter what my role is.”

“You do have a role. It’s not to die,” Kokichi says.

“Why would I willingly die just to spite you?” Kiibo counters, rolling his eyes. “Ouma-”

“Shhh, not a word more my loyal minion!” Kokichi spins the robot around by the shoulders and starts to march him towards the door. “Now, you’ve been a great help but-”

“I am not leaving this room until you agree to let me help you,” Kiibo firmly says before digging his feet into the carpet. Kokichi almost falls over from the abrupt stop Kiibo brings them to. “I spent a lot of last night fretting over everything I heard and the realisation that...that this *clearly* isn’t our first time here. If we’re stuck in some sort of, well, loop, then I want to help to find a way

to end the cycle. It would be cruel of me to let you do all of the heavy work.”

“Kiibo, you’re only going to get in my way if you start meddling in things you shouldn’t,” Kokichi argues. “The best thing you can do right now is to play dumb. Ignore Shirogane if she starts questioning you and just keep your head down so neither her or Monokuma have a reason to come after you.”

“But-”

“Kiibo, I have already taken a big enough gamble as it is to get to this point,” Kokichi stresses, pushing the robot hard enough to cause him to stumble forward. “And I am *not* going to let some dumb robot ruin everything!”

“Ouma, I would never purposefully ruin any chance for us all to get out of here-”

“Then leave,” Kokichi says. “Stay out of my way, stay out of Shirogane’s way and don’t do anything stupid. Find someone to stick with today and for the love of God, *do not wander around alone*. I’m being serious, if you die then that will cause me lots of problems in the long run and I’m already getting a headache thinking about how I would even deal with the aftermath.”

Kiibo goes still and Kokichi blinks when the robot’s eyes fill up with static. The robot remains silent for a couple of seconds before his eyes finally turn back to normal. “I apologise, I was simply finding the right words to say.” He looks down at the floor with a resigned look. “And I took what you just said into consideration and...I won’t get in your way. I understand that you know a fair bit more than everyone else here, correct? If you think I’m just going to be a hindrance then...”

“Oh, so you’re agreeing to stay out of my way? Phew!” Kokichi happily wipes fake sweat from his forehead. “What a relief!”

“And I understand if anything happens to you any time soon then I know who the culprit will be,” Kiibo continues. “Ouma, I know you won’t like me saying this but if you do end up...dying, I will tell the group everything I know and also will also make sure everyone knows that Shirogane is a threat.”

Kokichi pauses before nodding slowly. “Okay then.”

“Huh? You’re not going to tell me that I’m being stupid?”

“No, because if I do end up dying any time soon, I’ll need someone to put a stop to the game in my stead,” Kokichi says. “And you’re the most convenient person to ask so...”

“You can just say that you trust me, you know?” Kiibo responds. “You know for a fact that I’m not a bad person.”

“You mean robot?”

Kiibo bristles. “Y-You’re ruining the moment!”

“I wasn’t aware that we were having a moment,” Kokichi says before clapping his hands together. “Now away with you! I have a lot of evil planning to do and you’re wasting my time!”

“Ouma, you’re obviously not evil-”

“Silence minion! Did I say you could speak?”

“Um...” Kiibo pulls a face. “No?”

“Well at least you’re not completely stupid,” Kokichi mumbles to himself before putting a hand on his hip. “Actually, scratch that. You are an idiot because you’re still here even after I told you to leave!”

“Y-You didn’t give me the chance to even leave before yelling at me!” Kiibo stammers helplessly. “I’m going, okay!”

“Good riddance!” Kokichi calls after him before realising he should probably give Kiibo a heads up. “Oh, and Kiiboy?”

“Yes?”

“Make sure you have a roof over your head tonight,” Kokichi says. “Just in case.”

“...tonight, huh?” Kiibo murmurs before nodding. “Understood.”

Kiibo leaves and the second he does Kokichi lets out a breath he wasn’t aware he was even holding. Well shit. He’s just lost the luxury of being the only one with a target on their back. Hmm. Well, as long as Kiibo keeps himself alive then that’s all that matters...

...and hopefully breaking down the wall is the right way forward because if not...

...well, he just has to hope that everything goes smoothly tonight.

—

To not create suspicion he decides to go to training after the night time announcement plays. His main motivation is to make sure everyone is inside before he finds a way to take down the wall. It would be extremely awkward if he accidentally drops the wall onto someone.

Tenko huffs a little too haughtily when he takes a seat at the table that herself, Ryoma and Kaito are already sitting at. “Tenko sees that you decided to turn up tonight!”

“Excellent observation!” Kokichi responds, giggling when Tenko barely restrains herself from reaching across the table to give his head a shake.

“Ouma, you came!” Kaito looks pleased that all of his chosen people for his training group are here. “For a second we all thought you were going to skip tonight.”

“And leave you alone with a scary girl and a scary killer? Absolutely not!”

Ryoma sighs heavily as Tenko scowls at him. “Ouma! Don’t be so rude!”

“Yeah man, quit being a dick,” Kaito says and he looks surprised that Kokichi even said such a thing in the first place.

“I think he’s the only sensible person here,” Ryoma admits, much to everyone’s shock. Even Kokichi raises an eyebrow ever so slightly. Ryoma lets out a small huff when he notices everyone’s shared looks of bewilderment. “Just saying that he’s not wrong. I *am* a killer yet no one treats me like one.”

“If Tenko had any reason to be scared of you then she wouldn’t be here right now,” Tenko says. “And Hoshi has made it very clear from the start that he doesn’t want to hurt any of us so Tenko fails to see why Hoshi is being so hard on himself.”

“...it must be nice to be able to believe in people so easily,” Ryoma murmurs. “I’m glad that you don’t think I’m a threat but I also think you and Momota shouldn’t be so trusting. Any one of us here is capable of murder. One day Monokuma is going to give us a motive that’s going to push someone a little too far.”

“You only have to worry about that sort of shit when it happens!” Kaito argues. “And so far I think we’re all doing really well showing Monokuma up by not being tempted by his current motive!”

“It’s like, some of the secrets aren’t really that bad,” Tenko admits. “Like Tenko doubts anyone is going to kill her over Tenko kissing a boy.”

“Actually, hearing you do such a thing filled me with rage!” Kokichi admits with clenched fists. “I’ll never forgive you for doing such a thing, Chabashira!”

Tenko rolls her eyes. “Oh? It sounds to Tenko that a certain degenerate wants to have their ass kicked.”

“Hmm, Momota did mention to me yesterday that his wildest dream is for you to beat him up,” Kokichi says, cackling when Kaito almost falls out of his chair when he attempts to put as much distance between himself and Tenko.

“I did *not* say that!” Kaito fiercely argues. “Shut *up*!”

“Well it certainly seems you’re doing better today,” Ryoma says dryly.

“Yeah, well, I thought I was catching a cold yesterday but it turns out all I needed was a good night's sleep, that’s all,” Kaito explains, looking away uncomfortably as Kokichi starts to grin knowingly. “But I’m in top form today! I’ll even prove it to you all!”

“Oh ho, so Momota wants to do some actual training today?” Tenko says. “He talks a big game but Tenko hasn’t seen him exercise once during her time here. Tenko thinks he’s all bark but no bite.”

“Hah?! The fact you haven’t seen me exercise yet is circumstantial!” Kaito insists. “I’ll prove to you right now how amazing I am at exercise! I once did a thousand sit ups in under ten seconds!”

“Wow, that sounds like a lie I would tell just for attention!” Kokichi comments.

Kaito slams his fists together. “I’m telling ya that it’s the truth!”

“Okay then, prove it!” Tenko challenges him. “Do a thousand sit ups in under ten seconds and Tenko will...will do two thousand sit ups and won’t take a single break until she’s done!”

“Someone is going to get hurt,” Ryoma sighs but doesn’t actively do anything to stop either of them.

“I know, right?” Kokichi oh so helpfully agrees. “Fifty monocoins on Momota only being able to do ten sit ups in ten seconds.”

Ryoma snorts humourlessly. “Do you think I was born yesterday? No deal.”

“Okay then, challenge accepted!” Kaito holds out a hand for Tenko to shake. “If I do one thousand sit ups in ten seconds then you have to do two thousand!”

“This is going to be the easiest win Tenko has ever gotten!” Tenko grins as she shakes Kaito’s hand.

“Are you sure you want to be pushing yourself after being ill yesterday?” Ryoma asks as both Kaito and Tenko head towards the grass together. “Not to be rude but you still look sort of peaky, Momota.”

“I’m absolutely fine! In fact, I’ve never felt better!” Kaito insists as he lies down on the grass. “Does someone have a stopwatch?”

“Tenko can count to ten easily,” Tenko answers. “And she promises she won’t count too quickly either!”

“Are they seriously doing this?” Ryoma murmurs, half to himself and half to Kokichi, who watches Tenko and Kaito from over Ryoma’s shoulder with an amused smile.

“Seemingly so,” Kokichi answers before standing up himself.

“Hmm? Kid, where are you going?”

“To join in on all the fun, of course!” Kokichi says as he skips over to where Kaito is lying down on the grass. Tenko is towering over the astronaut with a hand on her hip and a smug grin on her face.

“Hey, what are you doing?” Kaito asks as Kokichi lies down next to him. The leader starts to roll his sleeves up before getting comfortable. “You know you can’t join in right because you’re hurt, right?”

“Psh, my stab wound is basically a scratch now,” Kokichi responds before resting his hands behind his head. “Now how about we turn this into a race?!”

“That’s not how wounds work!” Tenko quickly scolds him. “If you start doing sit ups then you’re going to tear your stitches and then we’ll have to inconvenience poor Tojo by asking her to redo them for you!”

“But I want to join in on the fun!” Kokichi pouts. “This looks like it’s going to be fun!”

“Quit being a pain and sit with Hoshi,” Kaito responds, sitting himself up with a huff. “Chabashira is right about you tearing your stitches and I don’t want Tojo to start telling me off for letting you pull them out in the first place.”

“But if I say I’ll be okay then I’ll totally be okay. *Riiight*, Momota?” Kokichi smiles innocently as Kaito narrows his eyes at him, quickly catching onto the fact that Kokichi is clearly testing him.

“That’s not how it works and you know it!” Kaito retorts before tugging on Kokichi’s arm and forcing him to sit up.

Kokichi lets out a pathetic scream. “Aaah! Momota-chan reopened my wound!” Kokichi quickly grabs his side with a wail, leaning heavily onto Kaito’s shoulder. He sniffs noisily. “Now I’m going to bleed out and *die* and it’s going to be all your fault, spaceman!”

“You’re fine!” Kaito forces his hand away and gives Kokichi an unimpressed stare when he sees that Kokichi’s uniform has not in fact suddenly turned bright pink.

“Tch, boys...” Tenko shakes her head before putting a hand to her forehead. “You’re all the same. Silly and immature.”

“Aw, are you saying that Hoshi is silly and immature too?” Kokichi asks.

“Hoshi is a different brand of silly,” Tenko answers as Ryoma tugs on his hat. “He says silly things like how he doesn’t deserve to play tennis anymore and won’t even allow himself to be happy.”

Ryoma sighs. “It’s none of your business if I decide not to play tennis anymore.”

Tenko wrinkles her nose. “Still, Tenko thinks it’s stupid that you decided to quit playing forever. You still have the title of Ultimate Tennis Player and you’re just letting it go to waste!”

“Then that’s solely on me,” Ryoma says. “So keep your nose out of my business.”

“Hey, that’s no way to speak to a girl!” Kaito argues.

“Tenko doesn’t need a male to defend her!” Tenko rolls her eyes. “You’re just proving Tenko’s point that all males are silly and immature!”

“That’s right! You should both get on your knees and apologise to Chabashira for inconveniencing her with your silly male ways!” Kokichi says cheerfully, giggling when Tenko does not restrain herself this time from giving his shoulders a shake.

“You can be quiet too!” Tenko huffs. “You’re getting in the way of Momota and Tenko’s competition!”

“A-Actually, maybe we should postpone it for another day,” Kaito suggests. “Clearly Ouma is in one of his funny moods and wants to join in despite *knowing* he shouldn’t be doing shit like this.”

“Aw, you know me so well, Momo-chan!” Kokichi pumps his fists excitedly.

Tenko clicks her tongue. “Hmph, then Tenko will just do her exercises with Hoshi then because at least he’s mature enough not to mess around unlike the two of you!”

“I’m not messing around!” Kaito fires back. “It’s Ouma’s fault we can’t have our competition!”

“Momota, we all know you can’t do a thousand sit ups in under ten seconds anyway,” Kokichi says, lightly slapping Kaito’s hands away when the astronaut tries to flick his forehead in retaliation. “Some things are just always going to be impossible, you know?”

“Not even the most active people in prison could do so many sit ups at once and they had years of practice,” Ryoma comments all the way over from the table. “Swallow your pride and just be grateful that you don’t have to show yourself up.”

Kaito makes a strangled noise that is a mix match of humiliation, annoyance and a hint of agony. “Just for that I’m going to find a way to prove you all wrong one day!”

“I await with great anticipation,” Kokichi responds.

“Yes, even Tenko thinks she’ll enjoy watching a male make a fool out of himself,” Tenko says, chuckling behind her hand when Kaito pouts at her. The bell on her choker jingles along with her laughter.

Tenko’s giggles only fuel Kaito’s determination to prove everyone wrong. Unfortunately for him, Kaito also has to deal with the obstacle known as Kokichi Ouma, who decides to throw himself on top of the astronaut with a dramatic sigh when Kaito tries to start practicing doing sit ups. “H-Hey!”

“This sort of training is boring because I can’t join in!” Kokichi complains before puffing out his

cheeks. “And Momota didn’t bring a super fun puzzle with him this time so now I have nothing to do!”

“Well I didn’t think you were coming since you arrived so late!”

“You still could’ve brought a puzzle just in case!” Kokichi points out. “And I don’t want to sit around watching you all get gross and sweaty from exercising!”

“Tenko thinks you do plenty of exercise by constantly running your mouth all the time,” Tenko says smugly, grinning when Kokichi puts a hand to his chest with an offended look on his face.

“Momota, did you hear that?! She’s bullying me!” Kokichi grabs the astronaut's jacket and tugs him closer so that their noses are almost pressed up against each other. “You need to defend my honour by teaching her a lesson!”

“You can defend your own honour,” Kaito says, pushing him away. “And get off me! You’re heavy!”

“Chabashira, did you hear that! He’s bullying m-” Tenko slaps her hand over his mouth.

“Stop trying to make us fight each other!” Tenko scolds him. “We all know that Tenko would beat Momota anyway so-”

“Hah?! You’re wrong about that!” Kaito almost trips as he pulls himself up from the floor, unceremoniously dumping Kokichi onto the grass in the process. He ignores the leader's annoying whines as he slams his chest proudly. “I, Kaito Momota, Luminary of the Stars, have never lost a fight in my entire life!”

“Are you sure about that?” Ryoma asks.

It’s a one hit kill. Kaito looks like he’s about to fall to his knees in defeat. “What exactly is it about me that makes people bully me all the time?!”

Kokichi hums. “Do you want a list? I can make one alphabetically or chronologically-”

“I’m leaving!” Kaito scowls at him but something must catch his eye since he suddenly trades his scowl for a cornered frown. “Aw *hell...*”

“Huh, what’s wrong?” Kokichi asks before his eyes trail down to where Kaito is looking. “Oh.”

His stitches must’ve gotten jostled too much when Kaito pushed him onto the floor, the evidence being the almost barely noticeable smear of pink on his clothes. He delicately presses his hand to his wounded area. It doesn’t hurt so he doubts he’s actually caused any serious damage but the way Kaito is looking at him makes him think that Kaito is worrying a little bit too much over nothing at the moment.

“Geez, what’s with the stupid look on your face?” Kokichi asks as he pulls himself up from the floor with ease. “Clearly Tojo didn’t do a good enough job when stitching me back up so-”

“No, I did that,” Kaito says. “I pushed you too hard and now you’re-”

“Should Tenko get Tojo?” Tenko asks with a slight frown.

Kokichi shakes his head. “Absolutely not! I can assure you all that I’m not about to bleed out just because of one play fight!”

“Still, my bad man...” Kaito murmurs.

“Oh relax! You’re worrying over nothing!” Kokichi insists. “If I was *actually* hurt right now then I’d be milking the hell out of it! Full on tears and everything!”

“Yeah, I can imagine that,” Ryoma snorts.

“But are you sure?” Tenko once again asks. “Maybe Tenko should take a quick look at it-”

“If you wanted to see my body so bad all you had to do was ask, you know?” Kokichi teases.

Tenko’s expression falls flat. “Tenko changed her mind. He’s clearly fine.”

“Sometimes cuts bleed anyway if you jostle them too much,” Ryoma says. “Well, not saying that a stab wound is the same as a cut but if Ouma insists that he’s fine then there’s no point worrying over nothing.”

“Yeah but Ouma also likes to *lie*,” Kaito points out. “And I don’t want his wound getting infected overnight-”

“Momota-chan, you’re acting like an overbearing mother!” Kokichi whines. “Next thing you’ll be doing is wrapping me up in bubble wrap! Which, by the way, totally sounds fun and we should do that one day anyway.”

“If he says he’s fine then you’re just going to have to trust him, you know?” Ryoma says.

“The fact that Momota clearly doesn’t trust me breaks my fragile little heart,” Kokichi comments whilst crocodile tears gather in the corner of his eyes. “I’m going to go to bed tonight crying and shaking and sobbing just because you won’t believe me!”

“Alright, alright!” Kaito huffs. “I believe you, okay?! If you say you’re fine then you’re fine.”

“Oh but I’m actually fairly confident that all my stitches fell out,” Kokichi suddenly says as his tears somehow manage to evaporate in under a second. “And I’m bleeding out now right as we speak.”

“Even Tenko knows that is a lie!” Tenko says. “Quit telling fibs like a child!”

“Okay! Since you asked so nicely!”

“Honestly...” Ryoma looks like he’s fighting off a headache as Kokichi sits down next to him whilst Tenko and Kaito sit across from them both. “I don’t think I’ve ever met someone who lies as much as you do.”

“Nishishi, well, life would be boring if we all told the truth all the time,” Kokichi responds. “And I’d rather live a super exciting life where everything you say or do is a gamble! It’s like playing life on hard mode instead of easy!”

“Games always offer an easy mode for a reason,” Tenko says.

“Only babies play on easy mode,” Kokichi replies. “Are you a baby, Chabashira?”

Tenko sneers at him whilst Kaito sighs. “C’mon, man. Why do you always say shit like that?”

“Hmm. Like what?”

“You could try being nice to people for a change,” Kaito says. “It’s like you purposefully try to rile people up just to get a reaction out of them, which is really unhelpful considering the situation we’re in.”

“Oh lighten up, Momo-chan. I’m only acting like how I’d usually act in the first place,” Kokichi tells him. “I’m not letting some dumb killing game turn me into a pathetic boring person who spends all their time worrying. I mean, you act like a dumbass all the time too so we must be on the same wavelength, right?”

Ryoma quickly interrupts before an argument starts. “I think Momota just wants you to think before you speak because you could end up upsetting the wrong person one day, you know?”

“If people have a problem with the way I speak then that’s their problem, not mine,” Kokichi says. “Living life filtering yourself just to please others is boring. I’m here for a good time, not a long time, after all.”

“Well at least you’re honest about that,” Tenko grumbles.

“Besiiides, Momota has already told me time and time again how he believes in me anyway,” Kokichi continues. “So that means he willingly believes in every single part of me, including all of the lies I tell! Wow, you’re so kind, Momo-chan!”

“I think I’ve made a mistake,” Kaito sighs.

“Hmph, well, if Ouma does die because he ends up upsetting the wrong person then Tenko won’t feel guilty at all since she’s not responsible for his actions,” Tenko says. “Although to be honest, Tenko prefers this light teasing over arguing any day. Tenko is glad to see that Ouma and Momota are friends again.”

“We’re clearly more than friends, Chabashira!” Kokichi slings his arm around Kaito’s shoulders. “We had a steamy make out session and everything last night and Momota confessed his undying love for me, saying he’s never ever met a guy who has made him feel the way he feels before-”

“No I didn’t!” Kaito knocks Kokichi’s arm from his shoulder with a grimace. “Don’t say shit like that! You’re going to give everyone the wrong idea!”

“The wrong idea about what exactly?” Tenko asks curiously.

“W-Well, you know,” Kaito says. “I’m not into dudes and neither is Ouma so he shouldn’t say things like that.”

“That’s very presumptuous of you, Momo-chan,” Kokichi responds whilst Tenko stares up at the wisterias that are dangling from the gazebo with a thoughtful expression. “I can’t tell if you’re just extremely old fashioned or incredibly naïve.”

“Huh?” Kaito pauses before cocking his head to the side. “So...you *do* like guys?”

“I like interesting people,” Kokichi answers as he rests his chin on his fist. “As long as they don’t bore me then I’d go out with absolutely anyone. But that’s just a lie, I have extremely high standards and that’s the reason why I’m single.”

“Are you sure about that?” Ryoma says and Tenko quickly stifles a snort.

Kaito looks down into his lap with a contemplative look in his eyes whilst Kokichi tugs on one of the ears on Ryoma’s hat in retaliation. “Huh...”

“Hmm? Did I accidentally blow your tiny little mind?” Kokichi asks.

Kaito shakes his head. “No, I just...always thought I was going to grow up and find a wife when I got older. My grandparents always said I needed to find a girl and make her happy so I’d be happy. I guess it just never crossed my mind that...huh.”

“Your grandparents are right, finding a girl would make anyone happy!” Tenko agrees. “Tenko would be very happy if she found a girl to spend the rest of her life with.”

“Make sure to make every moment count when you do,” Ryoma tells her. “Because you’ll never know how much time you’re going to be able to spend with her when you find the one.”

“Are...” Tenko’s smile turns gentle, “you speaking from experience?”

“Yeah, I guess I am,” Ryoma says, offering her a sad smile.

“Hey, this is nice, isn’t it?” Kaito suddenly says, a large grin growing on his face.

Ryoma raises an eyebrow. “What do you mean?”

“All of us talking like this,” Kaito says. “Like we don’t have a care in the world. It’s nice.”

“You mean it’s a good distraction from the killing game, right?” Kokichi points out.

“Well, yeah, obviously I was referring to that,” Kaito sighs. “It’s just nice to be able to forget that we’re being bullied by a literal teddy bear for even just a second. Honestly, if it wasn’t for the rules then I would’ve punched Monokuma into orbit by now.”

“Will the rules even apply if Monokuma isn’t around to enforce them?” Ryoma questions.

Tenko hums to herself. “Well, if Monokuma isn’t here then he can’t punish us for breaking them.”

“But one of the rules is that we literally can’t hurt Monokuma,” Kokichi reminds them. “And I’m pretty sure smacking Monokuma into space is the definition of violence so as much as I would love to see that, how about we don’t do that for now.”

“Yeah, catching him would be a hassle anyway,” Kaito sighs, scratching the back of his head.

“Man, I can’t believe he managed to evade us for so long during the time limit.”

“Well he knew if you found him then he’d be broken into tiny Monokuma pieces,” Kokichi says. “So obviously he hid from you all.”

“Tenko just can’t figure out where he was hiding though!” Tenko slaps her hands onto the table. “She looked absolutely everywhere several times with Tojo and even she couldn’t find him anywhere! It’s like he was hiding in a secret room none of us knew about!”

“Maybe he was,” Ryoma suddenly tells her. “Angie did mention that she found a secret passageway in the girl’s bathroom. Maybe there’s a hidden room at the end of it that none of us know about.”

“Wait! There’s a door in the library Ouma and I found days ago he could’ve gone through to hide himself!” Kaito excitedly remembers. “You remember right, Ouma? The black and white door that’s hidden behind that one bookcase?!”

Tenko blinks slowly before her face turns red with fury. “And why on earth did you wait until *now* to tell us about the door?!”

“I-I completely forgot about it, okay?! We found it just before Monokuma gave us that stupid time limit so it completely slipped my mind until now!” Kaito explains before groaning. “But that door also needs a keyboard to open it, just like the one in the tunnels too. Tch, what’s it with this place and key cards anyway?”

“So even if you had brought up the door earlier, we wouldn’t have been able to open it anyway,” Ryoma says, most likely stating the obvious so Tenko doesn’t clobber Kaito over the head.

Tenko clicks her tongue. “Still, Tenko can’t believe Momota forgot to mention something so important.”

“O-Ouma didn’t tell everyone about the door either!”

“Yeah but I’d been stabbed, remember?” Kokichi says before sticking his tongue out.

“Besides, unless we find any random key cards lying around we shouldn’t care too much about the locked doors anyway,” Ryoma says. “And I doubt Monokuma is going to open them for us anytime soon.”

“What if we just ask him really, really nicely?” Kokichi suggests before clasping his hands together and wiggling from side to side. “Oh please, please, *please*, Monokuma. Would you be a darling and open up some doors for us so we can escape? We’d be ever so grateful.”

“Tenko thinks Monokuma would punish you just for the audacity alone,” Tenko says.

“As if Monokuma would even think about opening the doors anyway,” Ryoma adds. “If he ever did open up one of them then it would be to taunt us. I doubt Monokuma is ever going to do anything nice for us out of the kindness of his heart.”

Tenko rolls her eyes. “He even made a big deal out of giving us a bunch of junk after the class trial. As if any of us wanted his junk anyway.”

“It did unlock more parts of the school, including your dojo,” Ryoma points out.

Tenko makes a strangled noise. “Yeah but that doesn’t mean Tenko will ever thank him for it!”

“Monokuma wasn’t nice enough to give me a lab of my own yet,” Kokichi says with a snuffle. “I’m starting to think Monokuma just doesn’t like me.”

“Kid, I don’t think Monokuma likes any of us. If he did then he wouldn’t be forcing us all to kill each other for his own enjoyment,” Ryoma says.

“Well we’re totally doing the exact opposite of what he’s doing by hanging out and being friends with each other!” Kaito pumps a fist eagerly. “It feels great rubbing it in his face that we’re not giving him what he wants!”

“You do realise saying things like that is only going to provoke him?” Ryoma says. “It wouldn’t surprise me if he springs another time limit onto us soon. Clearly his motive isn’t working as effectively as he wanted it to.”

“Nah, he wouldn’t do that,” Kokichi responds. “Monokuma likes to keep things exciting so I doubt he’d rehash the same motive twice in a row.”

“Just saying,” Ryoma murmurs as he shadows his face with his hat. “Don’t be surprised if he starts to make things harder for us soon. He didn’t force us into a killing game to watch us all get along.”

“Well if he does try to push us then we’ll deal with whatever he throws at us when he does,” Kaito promises. “There’s no point worrying about things that haven’t happened yet so don’t start planning something drastic when you might not even need to.”

“Oh? What do you mean by that?” Ryoma asks with a challenging glare.

“Just saying that you don’t need to offer yourself up again last time when there’s no need to,” Kaito says, returning Ryoma’s glare cautiously.

Tenko presses her fingers together nervously. “Um, Tenko isn’t going to have to intervene, right?”

Kaito shakes his head. “Nah, just wanted to make sure Hoshi knows that he doesn’t have to do anything stupid like dying to keep us all safe. It’s...It’s my bad that I worded it harshly the first time I told you but my point still stands.”

“Hmph.” Ryoma turns his head with an uncomfortable grimace. “I’m still alive, aren’t I?”

“Hmm, maybe Momo-chan should think carefully about what he says next,” Kokichi comments rather quietly. However, he is loud enough for everyone to have heard what he said.

“It’s just...” Kaito sighs. “You shouldn’t have to die because that’s what you think would be best for everyone. I don’t know how you feel right now but you *did* survive the time limit and something tells me that was on purpose.”

“I didn’t kill myself because Gonta stopped me,” Ryoma reveals bluntly.

“...he did?” Tenko swallows heavily.

“And when Gonta started to struggle to convince me not to do it-”

“Wow, that sounds totally out of character for Gonta!” Kokichi pouts. “He stopped you from killing yourself but he used me as a human pincushion. Man, I wonder what made him jump from one extreme to the other?”

“It *is* sort of weird,” Tenko admits. “When Tenko thinks about Gonta’s trial, she starts to feel like we somehow managed to vote wrong even though that’s totally impossible.”

Ryoma narrows his eyes at Kokichi before shrugging. “Don’t really know what to say to explain why he did what he did. It wasn’t like we were friends in the first place. Most likely he got spooked when the time limit got too close and thought he was doing everyone a favour.”

“Tch, well, what he did was stupid,” Kaito says. “And it pisses me off that he never took responsibility for his own actions. He owed it to Angie to at least admit he killed her.”

“It does...make Tenko wonder why he turned to murder though,” Tenko mumbles, fiddling with the sleeve of her shirt. “It wasn’t like he was going to get anything out of killing Angie aside from the chance to escape but...ugh, something just doesn’t feel right. Tenko doesn’t think she’ll ever be satisfied with what happened to Gonta and Angie.”

“Well, it’s not like you can bring the dead back to life so wasting your time worrying isn’t going to get you anywhere,” Ryoma tells her. “You should just focus on surviving. All of you should.”

“Hmm? Are you not including yourself too?” Kokichi asks curiously.

“If I have it my way, I won’t make it to the end of the game,” Ryoma confesses. “So if you would

all excuse me.”

“H-Hey, hold on a second!” Kaito chases after the tennis player frantically as Ryoma walks to the dormitory with his hands in his pockets.

Tenko’s eyes look suspiciously watery as she sucks in her lips, staring down at the table. “Tenko... Tenko hates this.”

“Hmm?” Kokichi tilts his head to the side. It’s only him and her left. “Hate what?”

“Tenko hates that people aren’t treating life as it isn’t precious!” Tenko cries. “It’s bad enough Monokuma wants us to kill each other and won’t even tell us why he wants us to in the first place. It makes Tenko sick to her stomach that people are slowly trying to devalue how important their lives really are! No one here deserves to die and Tenko isn’t saying that because we’re in a killing game either.”

“You’re always going to have people who want to live more than others, you know?” Kokichi says. “Of course I want to survive as long as I can but not everyone is going to share the same sentiment.”

“Well Tenko...” She curls her fists on top of her thighs. “Tenko is going to make sure that everyone leaves this game if it’s the last thing she does. If Monokuma ends up killing her because she becomes too boring for him then so be it, at least Tenko will die knowing she didn’t give Monokuma the satisfaction of killing anyone to survive.”

Kokichi believes every word she says.

—

He creeps out an hour after they all head to bed. Ryoma and Kaito had been arguing inside of the dormitory and were both quickly stopped by Tenko, who reminded them both that people were trying to sleep. They had all bid each other a farewell and Kokichi had waited before sneaking out just in case.

Kokichi thinks the sky looks darker than usual tonight. The stars aren’t shining as brightly as they usually are when he steps outside once again. He’s already gotten used to the fact that there’s barely a breeze outside, although he does shudder when he heads towards the school, preparing himself to rush upstairs as quickly as possible to find anything that’ll help him knock a part of the wall down. As long as he destroys a big enough section that’ll fit a person through then that’s all he needs.

He’s about to open the school door when something catches his attention. He grits his teeth when he hears the unmistakable sound of talking and tries not to get too worked up when he spins away from the school and storms towards the steps that lead towards Miu’s lab.

“Iruma? Please open the door so we can talk!” Kiibo is currently standing in front of Miu’s lab with his hands clasped to his chest. “I’m sorry about everything! I don’t want us to fall out over this!”

“Hey, Kiiboy!” Kokichi hisses, causing the robot to jump “What the *hell* do you think you’re playing at?”

“I, ah...” Kiibo hesitates. “I need to speak to Iruma-”

“She clearly doesn’t want to talk to you so can you just go?”

“No I can’t,” Kiibo easily responds. “I need to make sure she knows I still want to be friends with her. Her friendship is very important to me.”

“You can do that later-”

“I want to do it now,” Kiibo says before knocking on Miu’s lab door again. “Iruma, if you won’t come out then I’ll just talk to you through the door so I hope you’re listening! I am really, really sorry that you felt embarrassed this morning over your lie detector. I...I don’t know why it didn’t work but with your amazing talent I’m sure you can fix it and make it even better!”

Kokichi sighs impatiently as he leans against Miu’s lab wall.

“Even though you think you have no reason to believe me right now, I do want to prove to you that you *can* trust me,” Kiibo continues. “And I would very much like it if we could talk to each other tomorrow and try to salvage our friendship. I respect you a lot, Iruma. I hope we can continue being friends.”

“Oh, finally...” Kokichi rolls his eyes as Kiibo walks away from her lab. Clearly Miu isn’t feeling very generous since she doesn’t open the door to give Kiibo a response. Kokichi can’t help but feel slightly bad for the robot but he also has a lot more important things to worry about right now.

“My apologies, I know you are planning on doing something tonight,” Kiibo says. “And I know you said you wanted to work alone but after some thought, I decided I can’t allow you to do that.”

“Kiiboy, are you being *serious* right now?” Kokichi groans. “I don’t have time to argue-”

“Then don’t argue. I’m coming with you and that’s final,” Kiibo says. “I refuse to stand back whilst something bad might happen to you. With the state you’re in you’re not in any condition to fight back if needed so I want to be by your side so I can protect you.”

Kiibo heads towards the school before Kokichi can stop him. He stares at the robot’s back in disbelief before chasing after Kiibo, barely managing to make it through the front doors of the school before they start to close. The robot looks at him expectantly and Kokichi sighs and grabs his wrist.

“C’mon then...” He drags him up to the third floor and into the room full of weapons. Kiibo blinks as Kokichi quickly starts to go through everything, dragging a couple crates from under a table and filling them with anything that catches his eye.

“Do you know how to use any of these?” Kiibo asks as he peers into one of the crates.

Kokichi shrugs. “How hard is it to throw a grenade?”

“I won’t be surprised if you end up hurting yourself,” Kiibo sighs. “And quit throwing everything around so quickly! You might end up accidentally setting something off!”

“Relax, Kiiboy!” Kokichi dumps what looks to be a rocket launcher into another crate. He lifts it up with a grunt and shoves it into Kiibo’s hands. “Carry this for me, will you?”

“W-Why are you making me carry all the heavy stuff?!”

“Because I’m punishing you for not listening to me,” Kokichi answers as he picks up his own crate. He almost buckles under the weight but thankfully doesn’t drop anything. “Now onwards, Kiiboy! We don’t want Monokuma chasing after us now do we?”

"I'm surprised he's not already here to tell us off," Kiibo admits as the two start to slowly head back down the stairs again. The walk down lasts longer than predicted since it's rather hard to walk down stairs whilst carrying heavy crates.

Kokichi tries to shrug the best he can. "Beats me. It's for the best that he's leaving us alone. He's probably watching us from somewhere trying to figure out what we're doing which is *why* speed is of the essence right now."

"How are you so calm?" Kiibo asks as they reach the second floor. The robot's skin looks even more pale thanks to the moonlight filtering through the wired windows. "Aren't you the slightest bit worried that Monokuma is going to pop up out of nowhere and tell you to stop what you're doing?"

"If I'm successful with my plan then I won't have to worry about things like that," Kokichi responds. He shifts the weight of the crate around so that he's more comfortable. "Don't be such a worrywart, Kiiboy."

"But aren't things going suspiciously well?" Kiibo points out as they reach the top of the next flight of stairs.

"Huh?" Kokichi takes a moment to catch his breath. "I mean, *yeah*, but for now nothing bad has happened so as far as I'm concerned, we're doing just fine."

That's a lie. Of course he's concerned that neither Monokuma or Tsumugi have intercepted them both yet. It's a little too strange considering the fact Kokichi is clearly up to no good and their beloved killing game is in danger. He tightens his grip on his crate and heads down the next flight of stairs, the sound of his and Kiibo's footsteps echoing loudly through the empty halls.

Kiibo somehow manages to look rather queasy by the time they reach the bottom floor. The robot opens the front door with his elbow and keeps it open long enough for Kokichi to head back outside. The leader is rather pleased when he sees that no one has crept out of bed for a midnight stroll. He ushers Kiibo forward and jerks his head towards an area behind the school. It's far enough away from the dormitory and Miu's lab so if something catastrophic does happen, at least there's a lower risk of the wall being brought down onto either of those buildings.

The long grass brushes against his legs as the two venture towards the wall, the tall trees creating an even darker darkness as they head deeper into the greenery. He hears the sound of gravel crunching and winces.

"Hey Kiiboy?" Kokichi whispers. "Don't turn around and act normal. I think we're being followed."

"Huh?" Kiibo's shoulders do go tense for a moment before the robot quickly relaxes under Kokichi's strict glare. "What...should we do?"

"...let's keep going," Kokichi decides. "But before we reach the wall let's head towards the boiler room, okay? I'm more than confident it's Shirogane who is following us since no one has called out to us to ask us what we're doing. Just, *shit*, keep walking and once we reach the boiler room let's make it sound like we were going to try and break the door down at the end of the tunnel, okay?"

"But how are we going to get rid of her?" Kiibo heatedly whispers back. "She probably knows that we planned to do something tonight!"

“I’ll distract her in the boiler room,” Kokichi tells him. He jumps when he steps on a branch, causing it to snap loudly. “You head back outside and break the wall, okay? Make sure you make a hole big enough for a person to get through.”

“I-I can’t leave you alone with her!” Kiibo insists, almost dropping his crate as his body trembles with anxiety. “She’s probably furious that we’re trying to put a stop to the game!”

“Yeah, well, we don’t have the luxury of thinking up another plan right now,” Kokichi hisses. The moonlight casts an eerie glow onto them both as they both step out of the small forest. The boiler room is just up ahead. “You’re not an idiot, right, Kiiboy? Surely you’ll be able to break glass easily. Don’t look so constipated.”

“I have never felt so uneasy in my entire existence,” Kiibo huffs as they work together to push open the rusty boiler room door. Kokichi dumps his crate onto the floor and wipes some sweat from his hands. There are red lines zigzagging across his palms from where the corners of the crate dug into his skin.

Kiibo places his crate next to the door before clenching his fists, looking rather out of place in such an old fashioned room. Kokichi leans against a yellow railing and starts to whistle as he peers down the manhole near his feet. He wrinkles his nose.

The robot leans towards the door and hesitates before pressing his head against it, closing his eyes as he concentrates.

“I don’t hear anyone outside,” Kiibo admits quietly. “But I’m certain she followed us.”

“She’s probably trying to spook us,” Kokichi says. “She probably knows we heard her and wants us to start panicking. Just stand back and don’t do or say anything stupid, okay?”

“We’ve basically trapped ourselves into a small room with no escape,” Kiibo frets as he takes a step back.

Kokichi rolls his eyes. “There are two doors, Kiiboy. She can’t block us from both exits.”

“If Monokuma is with her too then both of them can take a door each!” Kiibo points out.

“Psh, are you scared of a stupid teddy bear like Monokuma?” Kokichi kicks the floor absentmindedly, causing a cloud of dust to appear. “Honestly all you have to do is kick him hard enough and you’d send him flying.”

“T-Then he’d punish me for hurting him!”

“We won’t have to worry about that if we manage to escape,” Kokichi says before clicking his tongue. “What the hell is taking her so long? I thought she would’ve tried to stop us by now.”

“Maybe she overheard us?” Kiibo suggests nervously.

“There’s no way she heard us whispering,” Kokichi says. “What the hell is she doing?”

“Are you...sure you actually heard someone follow us?” Kiibo asks hesitantly, shrinking into himself when Kokichi glares at him. “I didn’t hear anything personally but...”

The leader narrows his eyes before pushing himself away from the yellow railings. He kneels down next to his crate and starts to rummage through it. “Tch, well, if she’s just going to waste my time then I might as well get ready. Now, what should we try to use first...”

“Um...” Kiibo reaches into his own box and timidly picks up a rocket launcher. “This looks rather...” He frowns. “Actually, this kind of reminds me of a child’s toy.”

“Hmm, maybe don’t treat it like a toy though,” Kokichi says as he picks up a grenade and throws it up and down with his hand. “You don’t want to end up blowing yourself up like an idiot.”

“Says the one who is clearly treating a grenade like a toy!” Kiibo retaliates.

“Yeah, well...” Kokichi pauses as he catches the grenade once more but doesn’t throw it again.

“Huh, I didn’t think these things would feel so...rubbery.”

“That doesn’t sound right,” Kiibo responds. “And now that I think about it...”

Kokichi’s stomach clenches. “*Wait.*”

Kokichi closes his eyes and hopes what he’s just realised isn’t true. He squeezes the grenade in his hand and it lets out a high pitched squeak, deflating easily under the weight of his fingers.

“Oh *fuck.*”

“Is that supposed to happen?” Kiibo asks with a clear look of confusion on his face.

“Of course not! It’s a stupid toy!” Kokichi furiously throws it down the manhole before frantically testing each supposed grenade, growing more and more impatient as each one lets out a squeak almost mockingly. He drops the last one in disbelief and it rolls away into a patch of grass.

“Kiiboy, pass me that rocket launcher right now.”

“O-Okay!”

Kokichi practically snatches it from the robot’s hands and examines it closely. It feels like plastic. It feels like fucking plastic. He was in such a rush upstairs that he didn’t realise at the time but nothing he’s brought with him is going to actually work. Someone swapped out the weapons for children’s toys and he didn’t notice. He stupidly decided to wait until the *last second* to grab what he needed and now he’s suffering because of that choice.

Fuck, he should’ve known that this was going to happen. Monokuma must’ve figured out he planned to destroy something tonight and took that option away from him. Shit. *Shitshitshit.* He doesn’t think he’s ever felt this stressed in his life. He paces back and forth whilst chewing on the end of his thumb, barging past Kiibo who looks like he wants to say something comforting but can’t find the right words.

The walls are just made of glass, right? He just needs one small hole big enough for a person to fit through. Maybe he can just start throwing rocks at the wall until it breaks? It’s a stupid idea but he is literally working with *nothing* right now. He is working with nothing and he feels like he’s trapped in another nightmare because he foolishly thought things were going to go his way for once.

Is it too much to ask for a single win? For just a tiny victory?

He’s not strong enough to launch something at the wall hard enough to cause actual damage and Kiibo has made it clear that he has no sort of cool robot functions that’ll help so...

...wait. Kiibo is pretty heavy, right? Kokichi can’t pick him up and launch him at the wall but what if Kiibo just ran into it? Yeah, yeah, that *could* work. If he takes a running start and runs into the wall then it might break since it’s only glass and Kiibo probably won’t get hurt during the process

since it's not like he has skin that'll get cut.

"Kiiboy, hey Kiiboy!" Kokichi grabs the robot's arm. "New plan. I want you to run into the wall and break it yourself."

"*What?!*" Kiibo's incredulous cry is not all that surprising. "You seriously want to use me as a battering ram?!"

"It's literally the only choice we have," Kokichi tells him. "You want to save everyone, right?"

"Well *of course*-"

"Then run into the wall as hard as you can," Kokichi says. "It's only glass so it should shatter if you run into it with enough speed."

"But..." Kiibo pulls a face. "I might get hurt..."

"You won't, you're literally made out of metal," Kokichi responds. "Kiiboy, *please*, this is seriously the only chance I have to break the wall before Monokuma does something annoying like make it impossible for us to even reach the wall anymore. You're literally the only person who can do this."

"I-I suppose you do have a point," Kiibo admits. "And I would like to get everyone out of here too."

"Then let's go before we're caught," Kokichi says, grabbing Kiibo's hand and running out of the boiling room with him. They almost knock over a very startled Tsumugi and Monokuma and, tch, he *knew* they had followed them.

They keep on running as they re-enter the woods, building up speed as they approach the glass wall. Kokichi can see their reflections in the glass. He can see how pale his skin is. He can see the determined look on Kiibo's face. He can see how their fingers are tangled together. Then, Kokichi lets go before he ends up running into the wall and causing some serious damage to himself.

Kiibo yells loudly before hiding his face with his arms, building his courage up as he gets closer to the wall. For a second, Kokichi sees what he wants to see. He sees Kiibo crash through the wall. He hears the sound of glass smashing into tiny pieces. He sees white pour through the hole and it looks warm and inviting.

Then he blinks before hearing a loud thud. Kiibo cries out as he hits the wall with an undignified yell before all but ricocheting off the wall and falling backwards onto the floor, his antenna snapping from his head due to how hard the robot's head smacked against the wall.

"Shit." Kokichi rushes over and kneels next to the robot, whose eyes are filled with static. "Kiibo? Hey, Kiibo, talk to me."

"What on earth was that?"

Tsumugi emerges from the treeline with an amused smile on her face. Even Monokuma is giggling by her ankles.

"Are you that desperate that you made Kiibo run into the wall like an idiot?" Tsumugi continues. "Neither of us were honestly expecting that but good job with being creative I suppose."

"Did you seriously think I'd make the wall with something weak?" Monokuma adds. "The glass

it's made from is the strongest glass in existence! It has layers upon layers of protection. I bet Kiibo didn't leave a scratch."

He's right. The wall looks untouched. Kokichi catches his frustrated expression in the reflection of the glass and forces himself to try and keep a straight face. "Hmm? What are you guys doing out here?"

"Oh don't play stupid," Monokuma says. "You've been caught red handed, buddy."

"Caught red handed doing what? It's not like I've broken any rules," Kokichi points out. "I was just pulling a prank on Kiiboy to make him do something that would make him look stupid."

"In the early hours of the morning?" Tsumugi asks. "And let's not forget about the weapons you both put in the boiler room. Hmm, or should I say toys?"

"Totally knew they were toys," Kokichi says tightly. "They were a part of my prank too."

"Ah yes. Was trying to break the wall down also a part of your prank too?" Monokuma says, speaking as if he was talking to a naughty child.

"Huh? I wasn't trying to break down the wall. I was clearly trying to make Kiibo look stupid and it worked!" Kokichi argues. He grabs Kiibo's shoulders and starts to lift him up. "C'mon Kiiboy, the fun police have arrived so it's time for us to skedaddle."

Kiibo blinks slowly as Kokichi tries to pull him to his feet. Kokichi wonders if Kiibo really *did* hit the wall too hard when the robot thankfully starts to stand up by himself, dirt running down his legs as he pulls himself to his feet.

Kokichi raises a brow when Kiibo silently stares at Monokuma and Tsumugi with a blank expression. "Heeey, Kiiboy? Whatcha doing staring at them like that? Let's get going before--"

"Excuse me," Kiibo suddenly says before putting a hand to Kokichi's chest and pushes him away all the while continuing to stare at Tsumugi and Monokuma. "There's something I need to do."

"Kiibo?" Kokichi is taken by surprise when the robot walks up to Tsumugi and Monokuma with an unclear purpose. Even Tsumugi tilts her head to the side, although she continues to wear a look of pure glee.

"Oh? Whatcha doing, Kiibo?" Tsumugi asks.

He ignores her and looks down at Monokuma instead, who puts a paw to his mouth.

"Are you broken or something?" Monokuma ponders before screeching when Kiibo suddenly puts his foot onto the bear's stomach and presses down hard. "*W-What do you think you're doing?!*"

"Something I should've done a long time ago." Kiibo slams his foot down *hard* and Tsumugi shrieks as Monokuma's body splinters before breaking into pieces, nuts and bolts spilling from the bear's stomach.

"Huh?!" Tsumugi scrambles backwards in bewilderment, a trickle of sweat running down her cheek as she almost stumbles on a rock. "Kiibo, what are you *doing?!*"

Kiibo's head snaps towards her and he kicks Monokuma from his foot, a spring catching his leg as Monokuma's body falls to the floor. There's a cold look in his eyes as he storms towards Tsumugi with no hesitation. It's almost as if he's a completely different person.

“Y-You’re not going to hurt me, right?!” Tsumugi starts to panic, sharing Kokichi’s look of shock as the robot continues to head straight for her. “I-I don’t understand what’s wrong with you!”

Kokichi spots Kiibo slowly reaching out towards her with one of his hands and the realisation that if he doesn’t do something *right now* then something bad is going to happen. Everything he’s worked towards will be for nothing. Every single sacrifice he’s made will be for naught. Angie and Gonta’s deaths will mean nothing if Tsumugi dies now. He almost trips over his feet as he runs towards the robot, watching as Tsumugi continues to stumble away from Kiibo whilst he stalks her like his life depends on it.

“What do you think you’re doing?!” Kokichi’s breath leaves his lungs as he all but tackles the robot to the floor, quickly straddling his stomach whilst heaving in deep breaths. “Kiibo, that’s *enough!*”

Kiibo looks up with him and Kokichi almost freezes when he realises how confident Kiibo’s gaze is. He’s never seen the robot look so unfazed before. Kiibo quickly turns his attention back to Tsumugi, who stares at the two with wide eyes before running off. Kiibo tries to pull himself up to go after her but Kokichi firmly presses him to the ground.

“W-What do you think you’re doing?!” Kokichi struggles as Kiibo fights back against him. “You’re going to ruin everything if you go after her!”

He yelps as Kiibo easily swaps their positions and his lungs start to burn when all of the air is knocked from him a second time. He wheezes whilst Kiibo presses one of his arms against his neck. Whilst he doesn’t apply any pressure, the fact that Kiibo could cause him to choke any second is a rather terrifying realisation. Kokichi swallows as Kiibo’s eyes flash dangerously.

“Please stay out of my way,” Kiibo says. “I need to go after her.”

“A-And do what, huh?!” Kokichi grabs Kiibo’s arm and tries to push it away.

“It’s become perfectly clear to me that we are wasting our time. Help isn’t going to come anytime soon and I have now realised that the only way we’re getting out of here is removing the people responsible for keeping us trapped here,” Kiibo explains. The lack of warmth in his voice is almost startling. Even though he is a robot, Kiibo has always spoken in such a human way, even if he does sound awkward sometimes.

Kokichi struggles even harder. “You *can’t* do that!”

“Of course I can,” Kiibo responds. “Shirogane and Monokuma are the only reason why this game is happening. Getting rid of them both means no one else has to suffer. I fail to see why you’re trying to stop me from going after Shirogane.”

“Because...” Kokichi winces under the judgemental look in Kiibo’s eyes. “You’re just going to have to trust me-”

“All I want is to end the game. If you can’t provide me with a good enough reason not to go after Shirogane then you’re only another obstacle that’s in my way,” Kiibo says. “And I will be forced to find a way to make sure you can’t stop me.”

He clenches his jaw as Kiibo presses his arm down a little more firmly. “Y-You’re not serious, are you?”

“I am unable to provide a reason as to why I waited until now to go after Shirogane and Monokuma but after running into the wall, I realised how stupid we’ve all been letting Monokuma

and Shirogane terrorise us all this time,” Kiibo says. “I may not have the means to destroy the wall but I can do the next best thing and remove the reasons why this game is still happening.”

“D-Don’t be so...” He wheezes as Kiibo glares at him fiercely. “Don’t be so naïve, Kiibo. Do you seriously think you’re going to be able to fix everything so easily?”

“Now that Monokuma has been dealt with, Shirogane is going to have no other choice but to surrender,” Kiibo says. “So if you will excuse me, I need to locate her and-”

“No!” Kokichi tightens his grip on Kiibo’s arm when the robot tries to stand up. “I’m not going to let you ruin everything, Kiibo. I have sacrificed so much to get to this point and I’m not going to let some dumb robot ruin everything.”

Maybe it’s the snarl in Kokichi’s voice that causes Kiibo to hesitate. “I want you to explain what you mean.”

“I...” Kokichi turns his head to the side and clicks his tongue. “As if your stupid robot software could ever understand.”

“Ouma, I believe in logic,” Kiibo says. “And if you give me a logical reason as to why I shouldn’t go after Shirogane then I will think about leaving her be. However, the fact that you’re refusing to cooperate makes me think that the only reason why you’re being so awkward is that you want the game to continue and I can’t allow that to happen.”

“That’s...” Kokichi chews the inside of his mouth. The weight of Kiibo’s glare is becoming unbearably heavy. “Kiibo, you really don’t understand. You *don’t*. And you’re not looking at the whole picture. You’re only focussing on ending *this* killing game but that’s not good enough. If you kill Shirogane then she’s only going to come back and she’s just going to make everything hell again and again and...”

It makes him almost spiral just thinking about it. Kiibo doesn’t know what Tsumugi is really like, he doesn’t understand what lengths she’ll go to just to keep the game running. He doesn’t know what she’s already done to force this game to continue. A threat like Tsumugi is the worst type of threat to deal with. She’s already proved she can get away with cheating. She’s already proved that all the odds are in her favour. She’s already proved that she doesn’t give a single shit about anyone’s feelings, that the only thing she truly cares about is watching everyone around her suffer and fall into despair.

That is what it all boils down to. Despair.

Since Kiibo is a robot he doesn’t understand what despair is. He never will. Kiibo doesn’t understand what it’s like for a dark fog to take over your mind and smother every thought until all you can think about is how horrible everything is. He doesn’t know what it’s like to have to force yourself out of bed everyday knowing that things aren’t going to magically get better overnight. Kiibo doesn’t have to pretend that everything is okay, he doesn’t have to lie to everyone on a daily basis. Kiibo doesn’t have to lie to himself just to survive.

Seeing the wall not even have a *dent* in it is the most painful thing Kokichi has seen in a while and it’s so stupid that he’s frustrated over the fact that a piece of glass didn’t break. The exit is quite literally looming over everyone every single day and whilst it’s so close, it also feels *so* far away.

Kokichi turns to look at the glass again and hates how empty his eyes look.

“Ouma,” Kiibo says and the robot almost sounds confused. “Ouma, I don’t plan to *kill* Shirogane. I

only want to apprehend her whilst we find a way to take the wall down properly.”

Kokichi blinks. “...what?”

Kiibo sighs as he pulls his arm away. “I believe we have both misunderstood each other’s intentions. I don’t wish to harm Shirogane. I simply want to apprehend her long enough for us to create a hole in the wall. I don’t believe that Monokuma got rid of the weapons he swapped out for toys so they must be somewhere. All we have to do is find them and then we can put an end to the game, correct?”

Kokichi nods with a dazed look on his face. “Mhmm.”

“Excellent, so we’re both on the same page then.” Kiibo deflates as he leans back. “My apologies for treating you so roughly. I simply couldn’t comprehend why you were so desperate to protect Shirogane.”

“Of course I *don’t* want to protect her,” Kokichi mumbles. “But I thought you were going to kill her so obviously I had to do something.”

“Ah, well, I’m sorry that I gave you the impression that I was going to hurt her,” Kiibo says. “But I would like to make it clear that I would never hurt a human. My professor made it very clear to me that all life is very important and everyone should be treated with care.”

“Kiiboy, you literally drop kicked Monokuma into the dirt,” Kokichi points out.

Kiibo flushes. “Well, Monokuma is an exception of course.”

“Yeah...yeah he is.” Kokichi rolls his shoulders as Kiibo pulls himself from the leader before offering Kokichi a hand. He grabs it and Kiibo pulls him to his feet with ease.

“Oh...” Kiibo’s eyes flicker to his side. “My apologies but I think I must’ve caused your wound to reopen.”

“My wound? Oh, Momota actually caught it earlier,” Kokichi babbles before looking down at his shirt, which is stained with a dark splotch of pink. The adrenaline must’ve caused him not to feel the pain of pulling his stitches apart. He must’ve torn them out when he tackled Kiibo. Now that he’s not in a state of fight or flight, he starts to feel his side burn. “Ah...”

He then notices that Kiibo’s knee has some of his blood on it. The robot grimaces as he also notices the blood. “Ouma, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to-”

“It’s fine, Kiiboy,” Kokichi says dismissively. “Once we’re out of this game then my wound won’t matter anymore. Probably. Actually, let’s go with hopefully-”

“Still, you’re hurt because of me,” Kiibo says. “Perhaps we should take you to Tojo and-”

“Apprehending Shirogane is more important, right?” Kokichi points out. “We have no idea what she might be up to right now so finding her should be our number one priority.”

Kiibo hesitates. “Are...Are you sure?”

“Absolutely!” Kokichi pumps a fist. “Who knows what nefarious things she could be doing.”

“So...you’re not going to stop me if we go after her?” Kiibo asks. “I don’t want you tackling me again once we find her.”

“Well as long as Kiiboy promises that he isn’t *actually* going to kill Shirogane when we find her then I’ll think about not tackling you,” Kokichi says.

Kiibo rolls his eyes. “I promise I won’t kill Shirogane.”

“Good!” Kokichi nods happily before making a beeline towards the school. “Then let’s get going!”

“D-Don’t go ahead without me!”

Kiibo almost trips as he catches up to him, both of them practically jogging to reach the school door. Kokichi predicts that she has gone to her hidden room in the girl’s bathroom. Whilst there are two exits, if they both take an exit each then they can trap her. Kokichi is fairly confident that the door in the library is also an entrance to Tsumugi’s room.

“By the way, Kiiboy,” Kokichi says as they enter the school. He quickly starts to pout. “Why the hell have you waited until now to do something so cool?! The way you stepped on Monokuma was so...” He waves his arms around wildly. “Badass!”

“Well, I simply realised that Monokuma needed to be disposed of so I did what I had to,” Kiibo admits bashfully. He scratches his cheek. “And to hear you call me cool...I’m not sure how to describe it but it’s something that I would like to hear again. Is this what happiness feels like?”

“Oh don’t get all mushy on me now, Kiiboy.” Kokichi elbows the robot’s shoulder teasingly. “Sheesh, I wish I never said anything at all now.”

“B-But I’m glad you did! You praising me means a lot to me.”

“Yes, well, I rarely compliment people so you *should* be grateful,” Kokichi says before holding his arm out to stop Kiibo from continuing any further. “Now, I’m fairly confident that I know where Shirogane is hiding so I’ve come up with a plan to corner her.”

“Really?”

Kokichi nods. “Kiiboy, I want you to head down into the library and wait there. If neither Shirogane or I appear in...let’s say five minutes, head straight to the girl’s bathroom, okay?”

“The girl’s bathroom? But why?!”

“No time to explain!” Kokichi says before pushing the robot towards the stairs leading down into the basement. “I’ll hopefully see you in a couple of moments, Kiiboy.”

“O-Okay?” Kiibo tilts his head to the side before heading down the stairs, waving Kokichi goodbye as he is swallowed up by the dark.

Kokichi quickly heads towards the girl’s bathroom and barges inside, raising a brow when he realises that the hidden door is already open. Huh, did Tsumugi forget to close it? Well, like that matters. He swallows and heads down the cramped hallway that leads to Tsumugi’s hidden room.

Inside he sees Tsumugi by the large Monokuma head. He blinks when he spots Monokuma on the floor in front of the large Monokuma head, which makes absolutely no sense since he *just* saw Kiibo destroy him and this Monokuma looks fine. Well, he’s clearly in some sort of standby mode.

Tsumugi squeaks when she spots him and as predicted, dashes towards the black and white door and opens it with a key card she must’ve had in her pocket. He chases after her and listens as he hears the sound of a bookcase being dragged across the floor. He’s right behind her as she pushes

Kiibo to the side the moment she enters the library and the robot yelps as he falls into a pile of books.

Kiibo must recover quickly as Kokichi hears Kiibo running behind him. Kokichi watches as Tsumugi scrambles up the stairs, almost tripping on a couple in her desperate attempt to escape.

She drags her hands along the railings and Kokichi wonders what she's up to when she suddenly spins around when she almost reaches the top of the stairs and places her palm flat in front of her mouth. Then, she blows as hard as she can and it takes a second for him to realise that the reason why she had ran her hand along the railing was to gather the dust from it.

The dust goes straight into his eyes and that's all it takes for him to instinctively stop and cover his eyes with his arm. It's just a shame his foot wasn't entirely on the step before he was caught off guard and he stumbles, arms flailing as he tries to force his eyes open to look for something to grab onto.

He ends up falling backwards.

Kiibo catches him, he thinks. Kiibo catches him but is also thrown off by the sudden cloud of dust. Kokichi can't blame Kiibo for being unprepared to deal with catching a person whilst running up a flight of stairs. The only thing he *could* truly fault the robot on is throwing them both the wrong direction. If Kiibo had thrown them both to the right then they would've been caught by the wall.

Kiibo throws them both left and through the wooden railings.

And down another flight of stairs.

And they crash and tumble and fall until they reach the basement floor.

Kiibo's eyes go dark whilst Kokichi lies at the bottom of the stairs motionlessly.

—

There's something cold on his wrist.

It's probably the first thing he feels when he groggily tries to battle his way through the darkness. He can't see but he can feel that his wrist is cold. Then, he feels a pain he has never experienced before eating away at his side paired with the world's worst headache.

There's someone babbling near him and he can't for the life of him figure out who is talking. His hand twitches as he hears another voice. This one sounds more royal, more confident than the first one which had sounded bland and almost apathetic sounding. Then, someone starts to cackle and he wonders just how many people are nearby.

Opening his eyes hurt. It's a slow process since his eyelids feel like weights and the strange voices he can hear are hurting his head even more and when he realises just how bright the room is, he instinctively closes his eyes.

The babbling stops and he almost sobs in relief but then he hears the painful sound of heels click clacking against the floor. He tries to curl his hands around his ears for some sort of relief but one of his hands won't cooperate. Something cold bites into his wrist and he only manages to get one hand to cover only one ear.

"Oh, you're awake."

Someone is crouching down in front of him. On any other occasion he'd open his eyes to check out who he's dealing with but the thought of having light assault his eyes again sounds so overwhelmingly unappealing that he decides to keep his eyes shut. That's clearly, however, the wrong option for him to pick as he's suddenly slapped so hard that his eyes automatically open.

There's a blonde girl with twin pigtails staring back at him with cold blue eyes. She's wearing a skirt so daringly short that it almost rivals Miu's. Her lace up boots almost reach her knees. He spots that the bobbles keeping her hair tied up have a bear attached to each of them, one black and one white.

"Checking me out, are you?" The girl grins maliciously, putting a finger to her bottom eyelid and tugging hard to pull an ugly face at him. Her fingernails are painted a startling shade of red. "Hmm, cat got your tongue? Well, I'm not surprised. Everyone is *always* speechless when they get their first glimpse of the Ultimate Despair herself."

Is he having some sort of fever dream? Kokichi blinks slowly.

The blonde girl laughs and her accent slips into something more royal. "Peasants like you should learn to respond when spoken to! We've been waiting for a very long time for you to wake up!"

She grabs Monokuma and pulls him to her face.

"Upupupu! Yes we have!" She sounds like a female Monokuma.

He watches as she shakes Monokuma from side to side without a care in the world before dropping him onto the floor carelessly. Monokuma's paws slump onto the floor lifelessly.

"I must admit, tonight has been extremely fun!" The blond girl clasps her hands together before she throws a hand in front of her face. As if by magic, her hair switches to just a single side ponytail and there is a pair of glasses sitting on the bridge of her nose. She clutches a clipboard to her chest. "And it's been so heart pounding trying to figure out what you were planning. Watching someone try to end the very game I've been waiting my entire life to run..."

She waves both of her hands to the side and her hair is back into two ponytails. Kokichi notices that her eyes are swirling manically.

"Was absolutely fucking awesome!" She drools. "Having something I've poured all my blood, sweat and tears into be threatened caused a feeling so delicious that I wish you could feel even just a fraction of what I'm feeling right now."

She stands up and puts her hands on her hips, turning her back on him as she excitedly rushes towards a monitor that must've protruded from the ceiling. All of her pearly white teeth are on display as she grins at him.

"You better keep your eyes wide open as I show you something super important, okay?" She taps the screen with one of her long red nails. "Because there's something you totally have to help me decide!"

The screen flickers on and Kokichi sees that he's looking at the stairs going into the basement. His chest tightens as he spots Tsumugi run up the stairs before blowing dust into his face. His memory of it happening is cloudy but the video is a grim reminder of what happened. The girl is practically vibrating with glee as Kokichi and Kiibo fall through the railings and down the stairs. Kokichi blinks as he looks at himself sprawled out on the basement floor. Then he looks at Kiibo, who has no light in his eyes.

“Now what to do,” the girl says as she rubs her chin. “Was it the fault of the scrawny leader for falling into the dumb robot that they both fell or is it the robot’s fault that they both ended up on the basement floor for throwing them both in the wrong direction?”

“Where’s Kiibo?” Kokichi asks instead of answering.

“Kiibo...” The girl rolls her eyes as her voice falls flat. “That hunk of junk? He’s way beyond repair so it’s easier to just say he’s dead rather than even try to fix him.”

Kokichi swallows down a lump in his throat before growling. “There’s someone here who is more than capable of fixing him, you idiot. Let me take him to Iruma-”

“Why would I do that?!” Her tongue springs out of her mouth as she bounces from side to side. “It’s been *sooo* boring around here and this is the most exciting thing that has happened in days! Imagine the look of horror on everyone’s faces when they wake up and realise that another one of their classmates is dead!”

Who is this lunatic? “What the hell is your-”

“But back to what we were discussing earlier!” She easily talks over him. “I simply can’t decide what happens next. Do I say Kiibo’s cause of death is *you* since you forced him to fall? Or do I say his death was the biggest, most awful, most tragic accident to happen yet?”

“Are you blind?! The only person to blame for all this is Shirogane-”

“Uh, are *you* blind? The video clearly shows her just standing there, duh.” The girl taps the screen repeatedly. “Clearly you hit your head harder than I thought since you’re spouting absolute nonsense.”

Kokichi glowers at her. “You weren’t there, you condescending piece of-”

She puts her glasses back on. “Well it’s clear to me that the main cause of the robot’s death is you cruelly forcing him to catch you and making him stumble to his death. So, how would you like to be punished in the morning?”

“...hah?”

Kokichi’s body goes slack as his anger drains from him in a matter of seconds. The blonde hair girl tries to keep a straight face before she starts giggling. He stares at her whilst she doubles over in laughter before grabbing her hair and tugging it from her head. A wave of blue hair tumbles down the girl’s back. Now standing by the monitor is Tsumugi, who starts to wipe tears from her eyes.

“Just *kidding!*” Tsumugi reveals between giggles. “Sucks to be you but I’m not letting you off so easily. Killing you now would be too boring and honestly it’s fun living in fear that you might ruin my killing game!”

He feels like he’s about to throw up. His heart is beating fast, *too fast*. There are several insults sitting on the tip of his tongue but he can’t open his mouth to argue with her. For the first time in a while, he’s speechless. He doesn’t know what to say and he doesn’t know if he can even speak in the first place. There’s too much static in his ears for him to hear Tsumugi continue to laugh at him and he turns his head to the side to look at his cuffed hand instead. He notices that he’s been cuffed to a tube that’s attached to the block that the Monokuma head is sitting on. He shudders when their eyes meet.

Tsumugi heads back over to kneel in front of him, cradling his cheek and forcing him to look her in

the eye as she speaks. “Hey, don’t feel *too* bad about Kiibo dying. He was only going to get in the way anyway.”

“T-That’s-” His tongue feels heavy.

“Oh my, you’re *actually* upset that he’s dead?” Tsumugi smiles at him with fake sympathy. “Well at least someone cared about him in the end, I suppose. Do you know how funny it was to watch him beg for Iruma’s forgiveness and for her to ignore him? She’s going to be *so* sad when she finds him tomorrow!”

This is wrong. This is so fucked up. This is a completely new level of sadism.

“Chin up, Supreme Leader. It’s not like you have to worry about fighting for your innocence since you’re not guilty,” Tsumugi tells him, rubbing his cheek with her thumb. “And once Kiibo’s trial is over and done with he’ll be put where he belongs with Angie and Gonta, although it *was* kind of hard to put Gonta in a coffin since he was so...okay, okay, I’ll stop talking since you look like you’re about to throw up and I refuse to let you ruin my Junko Enoshima cosplay.”

The vivid imagery makes his stomach churn.

Tsumugi finally stops caressing his cheek. His skin feels like it’s burning. “So, um, I would let you go but I totally can’t have you actually doing something stupid like breaking the wall and I need to reboot Monokuma so, like, you’re okay with staying here for the night, right?”

“No!” The answer slips from his lips before he can even stop himself. However, it’s the truth. There’s a wild and uncontrollable voice screaming at him that if he stays in this room any longer then he will die. *He will die*. He needs to leave right now but the small slither of pride he’s still desperately clinging onto doesn’t allow him to beg for her to free him.

“No?” Tsumugi looks rather amused. “Ah, sorry, I suppose I made it sound like you had a choice. You’re staying down here tonight and I’ll get you in the morning, okay?”

“You can’t-”

“Ugh, stop being a pain,” Tsumugi complains. “Honestly, you can be so annoying sometimes. It’s so weird how people are actually tolerating you during this game. If things were different then someone like Momota would’ve punched you by now.” Then, she has this horrible look in her eyes as she realises she can pour even more salt into his metaphorical wound. “Actually, now that I think about it I’m confident the only reason why he’s trying so hard to be your friend is because his planned sidekicks aren’t here. If Harukawa and Saihara were here, Momota wouldn’t have even given you a second thought. Oh, oh, which also reminds me! If Yumeno was also here then Chabashira wouldn’t even give you the time of day either! I guess that’s the one good thing about having some people missing, I get to see you all adapt to dealing with different people!”

Her words hurt more than the slap she gave him earlier.

“So anyway, as much as I would love to stay here and chat, rebooting Monokuma does take a while so...” Tsumugi picks up the bear and cradles him to her chest. “Try not to have too much fun without me, okay?”

“Don’t le-”

Tsumugi uses Monokuma’s paw to wave goodbye to him, the lights in the room turning off automatically as she leaves.

Kokichi curses under his breath before frantically trying to tug his hand free, the cold metal of the handcuffs nipping at his skin. He runs a hand through his hair as he tries to find a spare hairpin to help him escape, swearing loudly as he realises that Tsumugi must've taken them all.

That doesn't stop him from continuing to fight with the handcuffs, even though he knows it's a losing battle. Besides, it helps distract him from the overwhelming panic that's making itself home in his chest.

She frees him as promised before the morning announcement and helps him leave the school before Kirumi wakes up to prepare breakfast.

He's well aware he looks downright frightening. He stumbles every step he takes, almost teetering to the side as his head spins. There's blood coating one of his sleeves from all the times he tried to fight the handcuffs. He lost, of course. The real kicker is the fact his wound on his side has been open all night and he doesn't think it's stopped bleeding even for a second.

When he catches his reflection from the glass walls of the dormitory, he realises his skin has turned a very sickly grey colour. Even Tsumugi is starting to look like she regrets keeping him down in her secret room all night with an untreated wound as he very ungracefully tries to climb the stairs to get to his room.

He trips on the top step and ends up on the floor. He hears Tsumugi giggle as he tries to pull himself up, only to stumble into one of the doors in front of him. Kokichi slides down it with a groan.

From the corner of his eye he sees Tsumugi open her mouth to mock him when she rather suddenly dives into her own room. He blinks at where she was just standing before realising the door he's leaning on has suddenly turned very...*not* door like. He looks up and sees Kaito looking down at him with a clear look of confusion, which instantly melts into one of horror when he spots all of the blood that is staining Kokichi's poor white uniform.

"Oh, good morning, spaceman," Kokichi murmurs as he tries to pull himself up using Kaito's leg.

"O-Ouma?!"

"...think I got the wrong room," Kokichi mumbles as he limps towards his own bedroom door.

"Hold on just a damn second!" Kaito grabs his arm and pulls him back. The world spins violently. "What...dude, what the *fuck* happened to you?"

"Oh, you know...stuff," Kokichi helpfully answers. "T-Things..."

"Did...Did someone do this to you?!" Kaito pulls him closer as he inspects the dormitory, frowning when he doesn't see anyone else around. "Ouma, *who the fuck*-"

"Shhh...you're giving me a headache." He rubs his temple with a groan. "Shit..."

"L-Let's get you sorted out, okay?" Kaito puts a hand on his shoulder. "You're safe now-"

"Actually, Momo-chan? Could you, ah, do me a tiny favour?"

"Dude, you look like you're going to keel-"

“Catch me.”

He sees that Kaito is saying something but he can't hear a word he's saying. The world twists and tilts and fizzles and suddenly he feels like he's lighter than air, which is ironic because seconds later he falls towards the floor and he absentmindedly wonders where he's going to wake up the next time he opens his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if the Junko Enoshima scene was out of character because I literally don't know much about her at all lol.

Kokichi Ouma - Chapter 3 Part 1

Chapter Notes

Sorry for how long it took to get this chapter out! I was really sick for a week straight and couldn't get as much writing done as I wanted.

Also thank you so much to everyone who left a comment on the previous chapter. I feel bad that I didn't respond to any of them but by the time I was feeling better I wasn't sure if it was too awkward to respond after not responding for so long. I just want to make it clear that I do appreciate every comment that was left!!!

I've reread this chapter several times and continuously found small mistakes in it. If there are still any mistakes I've missed then sorry in advance :.)

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Time blurs and melts and overlaps into one incomprehensible mess.

He can't tell whether it's day or night, whether he's awake or asleep...whether he's dead or alive. He wishes there was someone to guide him through the fog, to take hold of his existence and make him feel something. Trapped isn't the right word to describe how he's feeling right now. Perhaps lost is more correct.

Sometimes he hears distant chatter, although it is very hard to pinpoint whether he's being spoken to or if people are simply talking near him. Well, it's not like he can respond so even if people are talking to him it's not like he can answer.

The first somewhat clear conversation he hears is more of a one sided screaming match. Everything is blurry and he isn't entirely sure if he's awake or dreaming when he hears Miu screech bloody murder at someone. All he can see is a kaleidoscope of blues and greys and purples merge and intertwine against each other like oil on water.

"He *knows* something!" Miu screams and the colours twitch nervously as his eyes roll unconsciously to the source of her screaming. "He fucking knows something and I'm not leaving until the bastard wakes up and-"

"Iruma. Leave. *Now*." That's...Kirumi, he thinks. Her voice is accompanied with small pinpricks of discomfort that criss-cross along his side. He smells copper.

"Not until I get answers!"

"For fucks sake, Iruma!" Ah, that must be Kaito. His voice sounds intense. "Let it go! We've *just* finished Kiibo's trial and if even Monokuma thinks that Kiibo's death was just an accident then-"

There's a slam. Perhaps a hand hitting a door? "There was blood on Kiibo's leg and that asshole was covered in it! *He still is!* He knows something that the rest of us don't and I ain't fucking leaving until-"

“Iruma, he’s not even awake in the first place so you’re not going to get any answers any time soon,” Tenko says. “Please, it’s been a long day. Tenko thinks you should get some rest.”

“And you’re not going to find the answers you’re looking for here,” Kirumi adds. There’s a pinching sensation in his side that hurts a little too much. “Momota, Hoshi and Chabashira all gave him an alibi for last night-”

“He did something. I’m fucking telling you all,” Miu snaps. “As soon as he wakes up I call first fucking dibs to grill him.”

“No one is grilling anyone!” Kaito grunts. It sounds like he’s forcibly pushing Miu out of the room. “Seriously, just get out of here!”

“*Fine!*” The click clacking of her heels jumbles together with the sound of crackling static and once again he’s left drifting in a cold darkness that tugs at all of his limbs and drags him down, down, down.

—

The next time he surfaces he ends up eavesdropping on a conversation that maybe just started a couple minutes ago.

“Are you sure we should be doing our, um, what did you call it? Mental training in his room?” Tenko asks and she sounds rather nervous, as if Kokichi is going to suddenly lunge from his bed and berate her for simply existing.

“Well Tojo wants someone to keep an eye on him at all times just in case he gets bad again,” Kaito says. “And it’s not like he can object to us being in his room so of course this is the perfect place for us to talk!”

“Keep your voice down,” Ryoma grumbles. “You’ll end up disturbing him if you’re too loud.”

“Tenko is amazed he hasn’t woken up yet from all the shouting that everyone has been doing lately.” He can practically hear the pout in her voice. “Tenko’s ears *still* hurt from having to deal with Iruma yesterday!”

“She certainly was loud,” Ryoma admits. “Thought I was going to go deaf at one point.”

“I mean, I get that she’s upset over Kiibo but she had no right to act the way she did,” Kaito says. “The trial could’ve ended in disaster if she had got her way.”

“What she was saying wasn’t illogical though, Momota,” Ryoma responds. “Like it or not, Ouma *was* covered in blood yesterday and whilst us three knew it was because of what happened during training, of course Iruma was going to bring it up.”

“Tenko *knew* she should’ve looked at his wound,” Tenko mutters. “He must’ve caught it whilst he was asleep and made it worse!”

Ryoma hums. “Momota, you said he ended up going to you when he realised how bad he was, right?”

“Yeah, that’s right,” Kaito says firmly. “He woke me up before the morning announcement and basically passed out after telling me what was wrong. I mean, yeah, it was really bad timing that Kiibo ended up dying when he did but I believe without a doubt that Ouma wasn’t involved, even if Iruma thinks otherwise.”

“Tch, well, at least he ended up asking for help in the end,” Tenko sighs. “Honestly, males need to learn to stop being so rough with each other!”

“It’s not like I planned to make him tear his stitches!” Kaito retorts defensively. “And I’ve obviously learnt my lesson too. I mean, shit, all I wanted was one night where we could just forget everything and one *tiny* accident almost made him look guilty of murder! I just...”

“All that matters is that we came to the right conclusion,” Ryoma says. “And that was that Kiibo’s death was just an accident.”

“Still, Tenko can’t get her head around the fact Kiibo died because he ended up falling down the stairs,” Tenko says. “He managed to survive for so long without anyone killing him yet he ended up dying because of an accident! That’s like a different league of unlucky!”

“Just comes to show that anything can happen to anyone regardless of the situation they’re in,” Ryoma mumbles.

“Yeah, well...” Kaito sniffs before rubbing his nose with a frown. “We’re all just going to have to be careful from now on.”

“Well *duh*,” Tenko says. “Tenko has a feeling Monokuma is going to make things harder for us now though. He looked really annoyed that he didn’t get to punish anyone and said that he was going to make the next motive a living hell for us.”

“Has he not realised we’re already in hell yet?” Ryoma mutters.

“Well we’re just going to have to carry on showing him up by not being tempted by his motives!” Kaito declares with a pump of his fist. “Technically his last motive didn’t tempt any of us so that’s a win for us!”

“Kiibo died. We didn’t win anything,” Ryoma points out.

Kaito uncomfortably clears his throat. “Y-Yeah, well...”

Clearly he doesn’t have an appropriate answer. Tenko sighs. “Tenko just thinks it’s cruel that Monokuma is waiting for Ouma to wake up to hand out the next motive. Tenko honestly thinks it would be better if he got it over and done with already...”

“Makes you wonder what he’s got planned for us,” Ryoma says. “Can’t imagine that he’s going to go easy on us. If another accident happens instead of a murder then I don’t think he’s going to be happy.”

“Who fucking cares about making Monokuma happy!?” Kaito slams his fists together. “I’m *glad* he’s pissed off! Just shows that we are capable of getting under his skin.”

“Steady on there, Momota,” Ryoma mumbles. “It might be satisfying to see Monokuma so annoyed at the moment but that only means he’s going to only make things harder for us from here on out. Monokuma not being able to punish anyone this time isn’t a victory, it’s just a reminder that he’s going to stop at nothing to squeeze another murder out of us.”

“W-Well Tenko isn’t going to let herself be tempted by Monokuma’s motives,” Tenko promises hesitantly. “She might not know what he has planned for us but...she promises that she’s going to try her best to not let him influence her!”

“Now that’s what I like to hear!” Kaito cheers.

Ryoma sighs again. “I hope you both realise that being optimistic is only going to get you both so far.”

“Yeah, well, we haven’t figured out how far the limit is yet for staying optimistic so until then...” Kaito pumps one of his fists. “I’m not letting Monokuma make me doubt anyone! I believe in every single one of us here and I know that we can ignore whatever motive he throws our way!”

The trio’s words start to inevitably blend together until it’s one indecipherable jumble that is too exhausting to pick apart. Kokichi lingers before eventually returning to the quiet limbo that welcomes him like an old friend.

Even as he traverses through the darkness, he manages to pick up on the sudden change of atmosphere. There’s a loud bang before he hears someone breathing heavily. The breathing alone is enough to ramp up his desperation to open his eyes but then he feels the undeniable feeling of someone pressing a hand to his face and it takes a while to click that someone is practically cupping his face with a hand that is rough around the edges.

“Holy fucking shit...” The person says and it takes a couple of moments to realise that it’s Kaito who is by his side, clearly on the verge of some sort of breakdown.

“Momota, whatever is the matter?” Korekiyo asks. He must’ve been in the room the entire time, which is strange since Kokichi hasn’t heard him speak until now.

“Dude, have you been...” Kaito starts to huff as he struggles to catch his breath. “Have you been, *fuck*, going around cursing rooms or something?”

“Hmm? What on earth are you on about?” Korekiyo sounds more curious than confused. “And do I need to remind you that I’m the Ultimate Anthropologist? Why on earth do you think my talent is linked to cursing rooms?”

“W-Well you like creepy shit, right?” Kaito points out.

“I think we both have a different definition of what is creepy but please, do go on,” Korekiyo says.

Kaito’s hand slides from his face and rests near his wrist. “So you know how Monokuma opened up the rest of the school for us, right? I thought I’d have a little wander around and check out some of the new places. So, shit, Chabashira tells me that there’s a building outside that she hasn’t had the chance to explore yet and I thought cool, maybe I can go check it out first and tell her about it since she’s currently busy making lunch at the moment and...”

There’s an awkward pause. “And?”

“Turns out the new building is a hangar and it looks all sci-fi and shit,” Kaito continues, although he definitely sounds a lot quieter than before. “And I was like, hey this hangar might have something super awesome in it or something space related lying around so I got real excited. It’s just, the further I explored, the worse I felt. Like, fuck, all I could feel was this weight growing on my shoulders and...I’m not the sort of person who likes to run away but there was this urge to fucking run, you know?”

“Are you saying you think that the hangar is perhaps...haunted?” Korekiyo suggests.

“F-Fuck no! Ghosts aren’t real!” Kaito shouts. “But I’m telling you that there’s something *really* wrong with the hangar! Something really just doesn’t sit right with me about it and I don’t think

anyone should go inside of it for the time being. Well, until I can figure out what the hell is wrong with it anyway.”

“So let me get this straight. You got scared exploring the hangar by yourself so you...ran all the way here?” Korekiyo says before humming thoughtfully. “Did you...come to Ouma’s room in particular to seek comfort? Or perhaps it was me who you wanted to see?”

“I didn’t fucking know you were going to be here,” Kaito admits quietly. “A-And I don’t know why I came here. I just...”

“Hmm, how interesting,” Korekiyo murmurs to himself. “You know, I don’t think you’re the first person here to suddenly feel panicked because of something you saw.”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

Korekiyo laughs lightly. “Well you see, when we first arrived here I was feasting on a delicious meal made by Tojo when a bowl of salt caught my eye. You and I both know that a bowl of salt on a dinner table isn’t anything unusual but a horrible feeling grew in my chest when I spotted it. It put me off my dinner entirely but to this day I’m still rather confused why I suddenly felt so...put off over salt of all things.”

“...really?”

“Why would I lie to you? I found the situation so interesting that I ended up asking everyone else if they’ve been spooked by something random during their time here,” Korekiyo reveals. “Tojo admitted to me that she finds the thorny bushes outside to be off putting whilst Iruma said that she had to invent something to use instead of toilet paper as she thinks there’s something wrong with it. Even Gonta told me before he died that he thought he saw a bug from the corner of his eye once and it scared him, which he said also upset him since he had no reason to be scared of insects.”

“Huh, so has everyone here been spooked by something random, yeah?” Kaito asks.

“Most likely,” Korekiyo answers. “Although it seems it has taken you until now to be scared of something for no apparent reason. There must be a reason for that...”

“Well the hangar wasn’t around until now and...” Kaito starts to mumble. “Dude, I don’t think I’ve ever felt so...put off in my life. The moment I stepped inside I felt like I was gonna...”

Korekiyo raises an eyebrow inquisitively. “Did you by any chance feel like you were going to die?”

“Y-Yeah!” Kaito nods hesitantly. “That’s *exactly* it.”

“I see,” Korekiyo murmurs. “That’s how I felt when I looked at the bowl of salt too. For a couple of seconds it felt like I was, how do I word this, being boiled alive.”

Kaito blinks. “*Dude...*”

“Of course it was just my imagination playing tricks on me but the experience was certainly strange,” Korekiyo explains. “Momota, did you experience anything like that inside of the hangar?”

“Well...” Kaito juts his bottom lip out before frowning. “I don’t know, it just felt like something bad was going to happen. All I knew is that I needed to get out of there and...”

“And?”

“...there was this feeling that I had to stop someone from doing something stupid,” Kaito admits quietly. “Several people, actually. It felt like if I stayed in there for any longer then someone was going to come after me but...I had this feeling that if someone did come after me then something bad would happen to them, you know?”

“So are you saying that perhaps you felt like if you ended up being trapped in the hangar for whatever reason then something bad would happen?” Korekiyo suggests.

Kaito nods frantically. “Yes! That’s right!”

“How interesting,” Korekiyo mumbles to himself. “I must investigate this strange phenomenon even more. Your experience has certainly piqued my curiosity. Perhaps these strange feelings we’re all experiencing are linked to how we ended up here in the first place.”

“Or maybe Monokuma is just messing with us,” Kaito grumbles.

“Oh? Please expand on that,” Korekiyo says.

Kaito rolls his eyes. “Well he obviously has *some* way of fucking with our memories, right? Maybe he just wants us all to think that we’re slowly losing the plot or some shit and he’s making us think that bad things are randomly going to happen.”

“That is a valid theory,” Korekiyo admits. “And it wouldn’t surprise me if these strange feelings are Monokuma’s doing but I think I’ll still do some research of my own. After all, I am an anthropologist and documenting unique phenomena is one of the reasons why I became one in the first place.”

“You do you, man,” Kaito says. “But I think Monokuma is just messing with us.”

“Even if he is, I would love to learn how he is managing to alter our minds so easily,” Korekiyo eagerly confesses. “After all, it’s not as if he’s using magic to change our memories and emotions. Although...”

“Magic isn’t real, dumbass,” Kaito sighs. “Only little kids believe in that sort of crap. The only way things are ever accomplished is through sweat and hard work!”

“You should try being more open minded, Momota,” Korekiyo responds. “I understand you like to believe in what you think is true but that sort of thinking is very dangerous, especially if it turns out you’re believing in the wrong person or thing.”

“Hey, what the hell is that supposed to mean?!” Kaito sounds angry. “You can’t just say shit like that out of the blue!”

“My apologies, I was simply making an observation,” Korekiyo says. “But even you must admit that you have very old fashioned views. Say, were you brought up by your grandparents by any chance?”

“H-How did you figure that out?!”

“It wasn’t that hard to figure out, Momota,” Korekiyo answers. “After all, you have frequently said some rather peculiar things during your time here.”

“So have you!” Kaito quickly argues.

“At least I don’t deny that I say strange things,” Korekiyo says. “Anyway, do you mind taking my

shift? I would like to get started with my research as soon as possible and I'm not going to get anything done just sitting around in this room."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever..." Kaito grumbles as he takes Korekiyo's seat by Kokichi's bed with a frown.

There are feather light touches on his wrist that he barely registers. He feels something peel away from his skin before a finger lightly traces around his wrist slowly. His hand twitches in response and the finger instantly pulls away.

"I knew it..."

"Oh, hey Hoshi!" Kaito must've been in the bathroom since Kokichi can vaguely hear the creak of his bathroom door being shut. There's a pause before Kaito starts to laugh awkwardly. "Hey, what's with that look on your face?"

"I've been in handcuffs enough times to know what sort of marks they leave," Ryoma says quietly. "Thought I was imagining things at first and it took a while for it to click but the mark on Ouma's wrist was *definitely* caused by handcuffs, I just know it."

"W-What are you doing unwrapping his bandages?!" Kaito quickly stumbles over to Kokichi's bed and starts to rewrap the bandage. "I thought I told you not to undo them!"

Ryoma pauses as he eyes Kaito curiously. "Why are you so desperate to hide his injuries from everyone? You've been very pedantic about not letting anyone but you do his bandages over the last couple of days."

"You know Ouma, he wouldn't like all of us constantly changing his bandages for him," Kaito says. "So I thought it would be for the best if only I sorted out the minor injuries and let Tojo keep tabs on his stab wound, you know, since she's the most qualified to look after that one."

"I mean..." Ryoma frowns as shoves his hands into his pockets. "I suppose you've got a point but..."

"But what?"

"You're lying for him, aren't you?" Ryoma says. "Because I know without a doubt that the mark on his wrist was caused by handcuffs. You claim he hurt it when he fell whilst asking you for help but..."

"But that's what happened!" Kaito insists a little too quickly. "He knocked on my door, came into my room and asked me for help and then fell over, hurting his wrist and head on the way down!"

"...is that so?" Ryoma doesn't sound entirely convinced. "Listen, Momota, I don't know why you're lying but-"

"I'm *not* lying!" Kaito argues, his voice rising in volume. "You weren't there when he asked me for help *or* when he fell so-"

"Momota, I don't want to argue," Ryoma says. "But I'm finding it very irritating that you're clearly lying. Are you trying to make yourself look suspicious? You're not doing you or Ouma any favours by lying to my face."

Kaito's jaw tightens as he throws his head to the side with a click of his tongue. "I'm not lying about him falling..."

"Yeah, I don't doubt that. The kid was out cold during Kiibo's trial," Ryoma responds. "But you do realise all of his injuries were on full display for quite some time throughout the trial, right? I got a good look at the mark on his wrist and it annoys me that it's taken me until now to realise that the mark on his wrist was definitely caused by handcuffs, not catching it on something after falling."

"Does it even matter how he was hurt in the first place?" Kaito grumbles. "All that matters is that no one had to be punished for Kiibo's death."

"I get that but the fact that Ouma was clearly handcuffed to something on the same night Kiibo died, well, something just doesn't sit right with me about that," Ryoma admits. "Makes you wonder if Kiibo's death was actually an accident."

"Hey, you're not accusing Ouma of killing Kiibo are you?" Kaito asks before narrowing his eyes. "Because there's no way he--"

"Cool your jets, Momota. Of course I don't think Ouma killed Kiibo," Ryoma says before sighing. "But I do think something happened that night involving *both* of them. It's hard to accept that Kiibo somehow managed to accidentally fall down the stairs. You saw how damaged the railings were. Kiibo must've fallen with a lot of force to fall through them *and* down the stairs too."

"But even Monokuma said his death was an accident," Kaito murmurs. "And he was clearly pissed off that he didn't get to punish any of us so why would he lie about Kiibo's death being an accident?"

"That's what I'm trying to figure out," Ryoma admits. "I'm hoping the kid might have some answers when he wakes up."

"W-Well just...don't hound him when he wakes up, okay?" Kaito crosses his arms. "If something did happen to him then..."

"Oh? I thought you were confident he got his injuries from falling in your bedroom," Ryoma says.

Kaito blinks before pulling a face. "About that..."

"Don't need to explain yourself, I've known since the trial that you were lying about something," Ryoma admits. "Well, more so you were lying to protect Ouma."

"...Hoshi, he just appeared at my door covered in blood," Kaito says quietly. There's an undeniable hint of frustration in his voice. "He started mumbling about random shit before asking me to catch him. I thought he just fucking died on the spot since he looked so bad."

"And did you catch him?"

Kaito shoots him an offended expression. "Of course I fucking did! I wasn't about to make his injuries even worse!"

"So his head wound wasn't caused by him falling in your room then?" Ryoma asks.

Kaito sighs impatiently. "Dude, quit making me accidentally reveal shit! If Iruma finds out I lied about his injuries then she's going to kill me!"

“Relax, Momota. I’m not going to say anything,” Ryoma reassures him. “But shouldn’t you be more concerned about the fact that, well, Ouma was clearly attacked on the same night Kiibo died? That’s too big of a coincidence to ignore.”

“I know!” Kaito grits his teeth. “I fucking *know* that, okay? But if I said I thought he was attacked during the trial then everyone would’ve gotten suspicious and, fuck, he wouldn’t have been able to defend himself, you know? Everyone else insisted that they were in their rooms the entire night meaning only Ouma and Kiibo would’ve been the only two people that we knew who left their rooms and...”

“All the suspicion would’ve automatically fallen onto Ouma,” Ryoma finishes for him.

“And I believe without a doubt that he didn’t do anything to Kiibo,” Kaito says.

“...you do realise what this means though, right?” Ryoma responds. “Someone lied about their whereabouts on the night Kiibo died. I...don’t want to believe that Kiibo handcuffed Ouma for whatever reason and I can’t think of a logical reason why Ouma would handcuff himself so...”

“Maybe...maybe Monokuma was involved somehow?” Kaito suggests reluctantly.

Ryoma shakes his head. “Nah, that just doesn’t feel right. I don’t want to doubt anyone here but, well, it seems more likely that one of us might’ve been involved with Kiibo’s accident. I have no clue who is lying to us but...”

Kaito’s nose wrinkles as he starts to frown. “Just can’t believe that one of us would keep quiet about Kiibo’s accident. If someone knows what happened to him then they should at least speak up about it.”

“Yeah, I think Iruma would also appreciate the closure too,” Ryoma agrees. “She’s been very, how do I put this nicely, volatile lately. Can’t say I blame her though, I think she and Kiibo were pretty close.”

“And for him to die before they could even make up...” Kaito grimaces. “Fuck, it just makes me hate Monokuma even more. Everyone’s suffering is his fault. I wish I could just knock him into orbit!”

“Same here,” Ryoma mumbles.

“I just wish I could do more,” Kaito admits. “I’m not saying I’m scared of Monokuma or anything but if the rules didn’t exist then I seriously would’ve given him a piece of my mind by now! Seriously, he’s a piece of shit for putting us all through this!”

“All we can do is just try to survive long enough until we can figure out a way to end the game,” Ryoma says. “Which, um, by the way...”

“Huh? What’s wrong?”

“Sorry for being so uncool the other day,” Ryoma says quietly. “It wasn’t right of me to say I didn’t plan to make it to the end of the game. Had some time to think about what I said and, well, I guess I’d be pretty pissed off too if I heard someone say they didn’t plan to survive out loud.”

Kaito blinks before ruffling Ryoma’s hat almost playfully. The tennis player huffs as he grabs the edges of his hat to make sure Kaito doesn’t shake it from his head. “Glad to hear you say that, man.”

“It’s just, you know, I’ve been through a lot of shit and it’s easier to say that I’d rather die than live,” Ryoma admits. “Spent a lot of years looking at the same four walls with no company. The prison I was in had separate cells so I spent more time alone than with people. Well, even when I left my cell I just kept my head down and hoped no trouble would come my way.”

“So what changed?”

Ryoma fiddles with his jacket sleeves as a soft look grows in his eyes. “Thought I was going to spend the rest of my life alone. I’ve spent...a very long time wondering if I had just a single person in the world who cared about me. I thought if I had just one to care about then I’d have a reason to live. When I woke up here, I guess I didn’t really think about befriending anyone because I realised I ended up in another prison. I just, well, planned to keep my head down as per usual and hope no one would hassle me.”

“Hoshi...”

“It was uncool of me to try and use the time limit as a way to justify me dying,” Ryoma says. “If I had died then, well, I wouldn’t have been able to find people to care about and vice versa. And...I can’t lie, I was annoyed when you kept pestering me to train with you. Truth is, I was scared you’d train with me once and realise you didn’t want anything to do with me. I planned to train with you once just to prove a point but...”

“But?”

Ryoma shrugs. “Even though our first training session was a disaster, I actually enjoyed it a lot more than I thought I would. Doing exercises with Chabashira was a lot more fun than I thought it would be and to tell you the truth, I was sort of relieved when she invited me out to exercise with her again even though you were too sick to join us and Ouma was busy looking after you. We didn’t say much but it felt nice to have a training partner.”

“Then why did you say what you did during the next training session?” Kaito asks. “When all four of us were there. If you were enjoying yourself then...why did you say you didn’t plan to make it to the end of the game?”

“Everything felt too good to be true,” Ryoma answers after a pause. “I saw you all having fun and I guess I was jealous how you could all joke around so easily with each other. For a second I felt like an outsider again and old habits die hard, you know? It was easier to reassure myself that I wouldn’t have to feel jealous for too long since I might end up dying soon anyway.”

“So what made you change your mind?”

Ryoma’s eyes flicker to Kokichi’s bed. “Kiibo’s death is a reminder that anything could happen to us at any point. Watching Iruma...breakdown after the trial was hard to watch. They fell out and she never got the chance to make up with him and that left a sour taste in my mouth. This might sound selfish but I ended up thinking to myself, if I died before I got to clear the air with you then how would you react? How would Chabashira and Ouma react? Then I realised I’ve never had to worry about something like that before and it dawned on me that well...” Ryoma clears his throat. “I’ve got friends who worry about me just as much as I worry about them now.”

“Damn straight you’ve got friends who worry about you now!” A small smile replaces Kaito’s previous large grin. “Glad you finally realised that you’re never going to be alone as long as you’re in the presence of the great Kaito Momota, Luminary of the Stars!”

Ryoma snorts. “You really need to find a shorter title to call yourself.”

“Hah, what’s wrong with calling myself the Luminary of the Stars?!” Kaito lets out an offended huff.

Ryoma hides his growing smile with his arm. “Never mind, forget I said anything.”

Kaito pouts before coughing awkwardly into his hand. “Actually, since we’re being, you know, honest with each other, I never really did, um, apologise properly for the way I spoke to you when Monokuma gave us that time limit the other week. My bad, man. I still don’t think you should’ve offered yourself up like that but, well, you were only trying to help in your own way.”

Ryoma shakes his head. “Nah, there’s no need to apologise for that. Even I can see now that what I said was stupid. I thought I wanted to die but I think it turns out I just wanted to have the same desire to live like everyone else.” He grimaces. “Just a shame it took Kiibo dying unexpectedly to realise that. It just kind of hit me that he was here one second and gone the next. Makes you realise that, well, you shouldn’t take life for granted.”

“Hell yeah, we should be living life to the extreme every second we can!” Kaito excitedly pumps a fist.

“Now maybe that is being a little too dramatic-”

“I’ve never been dramatic in my life!” Kaito insists with a grin.

“Hmm, I think you’ve been around Ouma too much since you’ve clearly become a little too comfortable with lying,” Ryoma says.

Kaito rolls his eyes playfully. “Oh haha. Very funny.”

“Speaking of Ouma, I hope the kid wakes up soon,” Ryoma continues. “It’s been what, a week now? He sure is taking his sweet time.”

“Yeah, well, hopefully this teaches him a lesson to not wait until the literal last second to ask for help,” Kaito huffs. “He’s definitely going to wake up soon though, I feel it in my bones.”

“The kid is going to get a lecture of his lifetime as soon as Tojo knows he’s awake,” Ryoma says. “And I know Chabashira is desperate to yell at him for being stupid too.” He hums. “Although we both know that his wound getting as bad as it did wasn’t because of what happened during training.”

“Huh? But I was the one who caught it in the first place,” Kaito points out.

Ryoma tugs on his hat. “Tojo said his stitches had been torn out entirely and I know you definitely didn’t cause that. You told everyone he caught them in his sleep but you’re going to have to do a lot of bullshitting to keep that story going, you know?”

“I-I’ll just tell everyone we were roughhousing a little too much when we were training,” Kaito grumbles. “You’ll back me up, right?”

Ryoma sighs. “So you want me to lie for you?”

“We’re not lying, just, uh, embellishing the truth a little,” Kaito insists.

“You’re forgetting the fact Chabashira was there too,” Ryoma reminds him.

Kaito pauses before pumping a fist. “Chabashira totally won’t throw us under the bus! I mean, I’d

tell her what happened but the less people who know about our lie, the better, right?"

"Probably for the best," Ryoma says. "If there really is someone who was involved with Kiibo's accident and isn't saying anything, well, I don't want to give them another reason to stay silent about *another* accident if you catch my drift."

"Wait, you don't think Kiibo's accident was...like an *intentional* accident, do you?"

"Who knows," Ryoma murmurs. "But it's better to be safe than sorry, right? I've got my theories and none of them have a particularly happy conclusion."

"...tch." Kaito runs his hands down his face. "If someone here is purposefully causing problems on purpose then just wait until I get my hands on them."

"I could be wrong," Ryoma says before grimacing. "Actually, I hope I'm wrong."

"You and me both," Kaito mumbles before clearing his throat loudly. He coughs into his elbow. "Ah shit, I think there's something caught in my throat."

"You doing okay?"

Kaito nods almost instantly. "Oh yeah, I'm totally fine. I just, uh, gotta go to the bathroom for a second. Keep an eye on Ouma for me."

Ryoma raises an eyebrow as Kaito walks a little too quickly to the bathroom and locks himself inside. He leans back on his chair with a sigh, giving Kokichi, who is still fast asleep, a particularly drained look. "Between you and me kid, I think something isn't right with Momota."

Unsurprisingly he doesn't get much of a response.

When Kaito re-emerges a couple of minutes later with suspiciously damp sleeves, he gives Ryoma a quick smile. "Sorry about that. You know how it is, when you gotta go you gotta go."

"Is everything okay, Momota?" Ryoma asks as the astronaut sits back down. He gestures towards Kaito's sleeves with his eyes.

"Oh yeah! I caught my sleeves whilst washing my hands, that's all," Kaito explains as he shows his sleeves off. "There's no need to look so worried!"

"Well I hope you don't mind me saying this but you don't look particularly well," Ryoma admits. "You're still looking rather peaky. You have been looking after yourself these past couple of days, right?"

"Of course!" Kaito answers and holds one of his thumbs up with a smile. "In fact I'm feeling better than usual!"

Ryoma pulls a face. "Not that I'm accusing you of lying or anything but...you'd tell me if there was something wrong with you, right? I'm not trying to turn your business into my business or anything but, well, it's been well over a week since you said you weren't feeling well the first time and you still don't look any better-"

"I'm fine." Kaito crosses his arms and turns his head to the side rather abruptly. "Do me a favour and just drop it, okay? If I say I'm fine then I'm fine."

"Okay then."

As the two awkwardly avoid eye contact, Kokichi feels something take a hold of his existence and he's guided somewhere familiar.

Everything is blurry as he opens his eyes. It takes a couple of blinks to remove all of the fog from his vision. It takes even longer for the static in his ears to die down. He swallows, noting that his tongue feels dry and heavy. Kokichi slowly turns his head to the side and blinks when he spots Kiibo sitting by his bed, looking at him almost expectantly.

Kokichi frowns when he spots the dents and scratches littering the robot's body. He wants to reach out and run a hand over a particularly dark scratch along his chest but his entire body feels like it has been replaced with lead and the most he can do right now is twitch his fingers.

It takes a couple of moments for him to realise that Kiibo is missing his antenna. It's rather strange seeing the robot without it. Kokichi continues to stare at Kiibo's head until he remembers that it's actually quite rude to stare so quickly averts his gaze.

Kiibo reaches forward and Kokichi almost flinches when the robot grabs his hand wordlessly. Kiibo's hand is cold and smooth yet there's an undeniable warmth that trickles from the kind gesture of Kiibo holding his hand without being asked. He licks his dry lips as Kiibo squeezes his hand and when Kokichi lifts his head to look at the robot, he notices that Kiibo has a sympathetic look on his face.

"Ouma," Kiibo says. "I think it's time to wake up now."

Kokichi frowns. Kiibo smiles sadly and squeezes his hand again.

"Wake up."

He wants to tell him that he's already awake. His eyes are clearly open so he's not really sure what Kiibo is trying to achieve by telling him to wake up. He swallows and tries to squeeze Kiibo's hand in return to somehow communicate to him that he is awake but startles when his hand ends up falling onto the bed. His eyes flicker to the chair that Kiibo was just sitting on seconds ago and blinks when he realises it's empty.

"Ouma, wake up."

Who said that? Kokichi wonders if closing his eyes might help. He squeezes them shut, his entire face scrunching up as he tries to figure out where he is and who is talking to him. Where did Kiibo go?

Something catches his attention behind his eyelids and he opens his eyes again tentatively, almost choking when a couple of strands of blond hair tickle his cheeks. His eyes instantly lock onto the pair of blue eyes looking down at him and his breath catches in his throat as a girl who suddenly appeared out of thin air starts to giggle.

The sight of her alone is enough for him to force himself into an upwards position and it feels like he's emerging from underwater as he sits up, his ears ringing as he takes in shallow breaths. He grabs at his chest, confident that there's something forcibly squeezing the air from out of his lungs, that all of the air in the room has been sucked dry.

He quickly tries to look for the girl just to double check that she's still in the room with him but no matter how hard he looks, he can't see her. This calms him down enough for him to drop his hand from his chest, letting it fall onto his duvet as the consequences of sitting up too quickly catch up

with him at an uncomfortably rapid pace. Despite being sat down, the room spins violently and there's a thump, thump, thumping rattling in his chest that also echoes around his ears.

There's an uncomfortable feeling of cold sweat trickling down his face that he's too exhausted to wipe away. His fingers dig into his duvet, almost as if he was trying to find some sort of comfort from holding the blanket. He hopes that he doesn't look as nearly as bad as he feels and bites the inside of his mouth when his bathroom door opens and Kaito walks into his room whilst whistling cheerfully to himself.

If he was in a better state of mind then he would've found it rather funny how Kaito's whistling quickly fades into silence when the astronaut notices that he's awake. However, all he feels is an unexplainable feeling of grief wash over him as Kaito practically sprints to his side and shoves his face into Kokichi's own with wide eyes.

"Holy shit, you're *actually* awake this time, right?" Kaito asks and Kokichi pauses before nodding hesitantly.

Kaito looks a little too relieved as he flops down heavily onto a chair that's by Kokichi's bed, placing the back of his hand to his forehead with a heavy sigh of relief. It takes a couple of moments for the astronaut to gather his thoughts before he cracks open an eye and sheepishly looks at him.

"So, um, do you remember how you ended up here, well, in *my* room actually but I suppose the smaller details don't matter right now," Kaito asks.

Kokichi chews on his bottom lip before shaking his head. His head hurts too much to focus on any of the misty memories that are leaking into his mind. He's well aware that there's something he needs to remember, that there's a lot of memories fighting for his attention to be remembered. Every couple of seconds something plays in his mind, like a snippet of conversation that dissolves into static before any of the words stick or an image that becomes unfocussed too quickly before he can get the chance to figure out what he just saw.

He puts a hand to his head with a wince, the pain in his head pounding as countless thoughts desperately appeal for his undivided attention. It's an overwhelming feeling that he would have forced to the back of his mind by now if he wasn't feeling so weak. The weight of Kaito's pitiful stare doesn't help either. Kokichi curls in on himself ever so slightly, absolutely *horrified* that Kaito is witnessing him be in such a vulnerable state right now.

"Okay, that's okay," Kaito says when he realises Kokichi isn't going to expand any further. "Oh wait, you must be thirsty, right? I'm pretty sure there's a bottle of water somewhere around here...*a-hah!* There it is!"

Kaito unscrews the cap of the water bottle he just found and carefully presses the bottle into Kokichi's hands. The first sip he takes tastes like pure bliss as the water soothes his aching throat. The second sip lasts much longer when he realises how thirsty he actually is. However, Kaito ends up tapping his arm with an apologetic smile after his second sip lasts a little *too* long.

"I know you're thirsty but you've got to take smaller sips than that," Kaito tells him. "I don't want you choking."

He wants to roll his eyes but annoyingly enough, Kaito does have a point. He starts to take much smaller sips until he reaches halfway through the bottle.

"Listen man, before you say anything I need you to listen to me, okay?" Kaito sounds

uncharacteristically serious as he leans forward, his purple eyes meeting his own as the astronaut places his hands down flat onto his bed. “If anyone asks, you hit your head when you fell in my room. You hurt your wrist by falling on it and the reason why your stab wound reopened is because I caught it whilst we were training together.”

There’s something about what Kaito is saying that just doesn’t sound right. Kokichi cocks his head to the side before looking down at his wrapped wrist, wriggling it experimentally. There’s a dull ache and Kaito shoots him a dry look as he grabs his hand to stop him from moving it any further.

“Don’t do that,” Kaito says. “And don’t give me that look. What I’m saying is the truth, okay? I don’t want to stress you out but a *lot* of shit went down after you passed out and Iruma in particular has a lot of questions she wants to ask you. As long as you tell her what I told you then everything is going to be okay.”

He wants to ask Kaito what happened, what’s been going on whilst he’s been unconscious. However, there’s this unmistakably desperate look in Kaito’s eyes that causes all of his questions to die in his throat. Kokichi blinks before a smear of pink by Kaito’s lips catches his attention. So instead of asking Kaito why he’s clearly lying, he reaches forward and wipes the corner of Kaito’s mouth with the sleeve of his shirt instead.

Kaito is clearly caught off guard as Kokichi pulls his hand away and uses his own hand to tenderly press around his mouth, paling when a smudge of pink ends up on his fingertips. Undoubtedly he was most likely coughing up his lungs in Kokichi’s bathroom before Kokichi woke up. The small leader frowns and Kaito quickly waves his hands dismissively.

“Quit looking so worried, I’m fine!” Kaito insists as he promptly starts to wipe his mouth with his own sleeve. “You should be more worried about yourself! For a while we all thought you were never going to wake up.”

Kokichi wonders why Kaito is continuing to lie to his face. He bets if people had to pick between who looks worse right now, Kaito would win by a landslide. The water bottle in his hand crumples as he squeezes it a little too tightly.

Kaito clears his throat and stands up from his chair with a rather pitiful look on his face. “Listen, I know you’ve literally just woken up but Tojo told me to get her as soon as you were conscious and, um...” Kaito smiles apologetically. “Not gonna lie, I’m confident that she’s been planning to lecture you for quite some time now. It’s probably for the best if she deals with you sooner rather than later, yeah?”

He dashes from his room far too quickly and Kokichi stares at his bedroom door that’s been left wide open and...actually hold on just a second. He blinks as he looks around his room and the cogs in his brain start to whirr uncontrollably as it clicks that he’s actually in *his* bedroom, the same room full of unexplainable things like his whiteboards. Aw hell. His headache worsens as he realises everyone is going to have so many questions for him that he doesn’t particularly want to answer.

How did he end up here anyway? Kaito should’ve done what he usually does and made him sleep in the astronaut’s room or something.

He senses Kirumi’s presence before he even sees her. There’s a raw and powerful energy emitting for her as she eventually steps into his room, closing the door behind her. The frown on her face is enough to make him want to instinctively hide under the covers. He feels like he has somehow royally fucked up and he doesn’t even know why. Kirumi approaches him with a white box in her hands, her eyes locked onto him like a hawk.

Kokichi expects her to start full on ranting at him but instead she wordlessly sits down on the seat Kaito had previously been sitting on and places the white box onto his bed, opening it carefully before looking down at the contents inside of it.

It's rare that he ever feels *this* intimidated. What's worse is that he doesn't know why he feels so put off. It feels like he's somehow in the wrong and he doesn't know why. He'd rather she put him out of his misery instead of giving him the silent treatment.

For a second he almost wishes Kaito was still here. Whilst it isn't exactly a murderous energy that is rolling from the maid like ocean waves, there is this strange feeling that the maid does want to exasperatedly throttle him. Kaito is one cruel man for making him deal with Kirumi alone. Kokichi looks away as Kirumi reaches down and picks up a bowl full of water and a flannel that must've already been by his bed.

Kaito said that Kirumi was desperate to lecture him but it seems the maid is holding back for now as she dunks the flannel into the bowl and to Kokichi's surprise, she very carefully wipes his forehead with it. Having the cool water wash away his previous clammy sweat feels unexpectedly more pleasant than he thought it would and it takes all of his willpower not to lean into the touch since he doesn't want to completely destroy his reputation.

"How much did Momota tell you?" Kirumi suddenly asks as she pulls the flannel away, a couple of drops of water trickling onto his bed as she places the flannel back into the bowl.

Kokichi pauses as it takes a second to register the question. Then it dawns on him that there's some sort of uncomfortable implication behind her question, that there's a serious reason as to why she's asking him how much he knows. Something bad must've either happened whilst he was asleep or he must've forgotten something very important.

"Not..." Kokichi winces as his voice cracks. It sounds like his throat has been rubbed down with sandpaper. He swallows. "N-Not much."

Kirumi pauses as she elegantly slips one of her gloves off and places her palm flat against his forehead, clicking her tongue as she pulls her hand away. "You're still on the warmer side. Even though you *clearly* don't know how to follow my instructions, I want to make it very clear that you should spend the next couple of days resting and you should only leave your bed for important reasons. Do you understand?"

Kokichi nods but for whatever reason Kirumi still doesn't look satisfied.

"My apologies but I must ask, do you remember how you got into such a state in the first place?" Kirumi asks him and there's something about her tone that causes goosebumps to run up and down his arms. Whilst her question sounds rather innocent, his gut tells him that she's testing him.

Suddenly Kaito telling him how he supposedly got into such a state makes perfect sense now. The fact that Kirumi is asking him in such an accusatory way (although she's clearly trying to hide the fact she's somewhat suspicious of him) makes him realise that not everyone must've taken Kaito's explanation to heart as to how he ended up in a week long slumber.

Then again, even Kokichi could instantly tell Kaito was lying. There's something telling him that the reason how his stitches were torn out wasn't because Kaito caught them whilst they were training. He vaguely remembers the two of them outside, Kokichi laughing before Kaito pushes him onto the grass. It was a light shove and whilst he did catch his side, he doesn't remember his stitches being jostled too much.

Kirumi frowns when he takes a little too long to answer. “Ouma, you do remember how you got so hurt, right?”

He *doesn't* but for whatever reason, Kaito has given him a clumsy lie to work with, a lie that is extremely fragile and teetering on the edge of being unbelievable but still something Kaito has been oh so carefully trying to keep alive. Out of everything the astronaut could've done when had woken up, Kaito had picked to arm him with a lie, no, a false narrative that he wants Kokichi to also protect. It...baffles him. He's completely lost and the only guide he has are Kaito's words. His only options are to either create a new lie himself or...or to blindly trust Kaito and his delicate lie that was born from...

...Kaito...believing in him?

Kokichi doesn't mean to continue to stay silent but there's this alien sensation that is growing in his chest and he wonders what the ever living fuck this feeling is. Seriously, what the hell is this? What is this anomalous feeling that he unexpectedly wants to...wants to protect with his own two unexperienced hands? All of this over Kaito lying for him...on one hand he wants to grab Kaito by the shoulders and shake him until he can't see straight but on the other hand, well, there's this new feeling of desire, of longing to preserve Kaito's lie for as long as possible.

Why? Well, perhaps a little bit of Kaito rubbed off on him just like how a tiny bit of Kokichi rubbed off Kaito. Whilst Kaito has lied for him, Kokichi has an unexplainable urge to simply believe in the astronaut for an indecipherable reason.

He blames his sudden lapse in judgement entirely on the fact he's just woken up from a week long sleep.

“*Of course* I do!” Kokichi responds with a smile. “M-Momota and I were training and he, ah, caught my wound! I didn't want to stop the session over a slight inconvenience so I, well, I-lied about how badly he caught it.”

“I see...” Kirumi puts a hand to her chin with a thoughtful look on her face, narrowing her eyes as Kokichi starts to twiddle his thumbs. She looks like she wants to grill him even further but instead she slips her glove back on with an unreadable expression on her face. “In that case I would like to ask you why on earth you would do something so *stupid* as to train with Momota in the first place. I was under the presumption that you were simply going to watch him, Hoshi and Chabashira train, not partake in it.”

Oh how lovely, she really did plan to lecture him then. “W-Well sitting around watching them got boring so-”

“That is simply not a good enough excuse,” Kirumi says, instantly bulldozing over his flimsy excuse. Uh oh, looks like he's about to experience a week's worth of pent up frustration. “You *do* realise what sort of situation we're in, correct? How do you think Momota would've felt if you died because you carelessly decided to wait until the last possible second to reveal how hurt you were? And I can't imagine that Monokuma would've taken pity on Momota for causing you to start bleeding either. What if Momota had been punished for your actions?”

Kokichi grimaces. Hmm, yeah, he can easily see Monokuma punishing someone over such a petty detail. “Okay, okay, I'm sorry-”

“Don't apologise unless you actually mean it,” Kirumi abruptly says. “Do you understand how *frustrating* it is watching someone act so reckless in a situation like this? You're a smart person Ouma and I see that you have so much potential. It is absolutely infuriating watching you act so

carelessly and pull silly stunts like this that could end up with you dying. What if one day you go too far and die and none of us are able to figure out your cause of death because you messed around too much? Because you refuse to let anyone know what is going on with you?"

"Geez, calm down-" Wait, shit, that was absolutely the *wrong* thing to say.

Kirumi's face darkens. "I *won't* let you put everyone else here in danger just because you won't take the predicament we're in seriously. Monokuma has already claimed three victims and you're acting like you're on a weekend getaway."

Three victims? But Kokichi thought that only Angie and Gonta had died so...

His head throbs and he winces, placing a hand on his forehead, trapping a couple of strands of plum coloured hair under his palm. Kirumi continues to stare at him with an expression so strict that he's convinced she could scare even Monokuma into submission. "And most importantly, I refuse to let you waste your life by acting so foolishly. As a maid, it's my job to see potential in people and allow them to grow into the best person they can be. With enough care you could go far, Ouma. If you really are telling the truth about already leading an organisation that thousands of people have joined then I easily can see you growing that number to *millions* if you tried."

Oh no. She's using care and compassion against him with a side dish of logic. It's one of his few weaknesses. *Ugh*. "Okay, seriously, I'm sorry-"

"You're not the only one here with potential either," Kirumi continues. "Chabashira has the potential to teach a brand new form of aikido to a new generation of people. Momota has the talent to explore something that is even beyond space. Iruma has the ability to create never seen before inventions that would be capable of helping the world. Do you see where I'm going with this? Everyone here have such bright futures ahead of them and I simply can't let you jeopardise that. It's bad enough that Monokuma is trying to force us to kill each other. We don't want another accidental death. I refuse to let another life go to waste."

"Tojo, what are you on about-"

Before Kirumi can say another word, his bedroom door slams open and he jumps as Miu storms into his room with a face like thunder. Whilst Kirumi had a more stern and worried feel to her when he sensed her approaching, all Kokichi can feel is an unrestrained feeling of anger and a desire for revenge from Miu. He presses his back against his headboard as the inventor tries to grab him only to be stopped by Kirumi, who holds out one of her arms.

"Iruma, what on earth are you-"

"I called first fucking dibs to talk to him as soon as he woke up!" Miu shrieks and tries to lunge for him again. "Confess you unwanted piece of shit, you killed Kiibo, didn't you?!"

"Iruma!" Kirumi sounds horrified as she tries to tug Miu away from his bed.

Kokichi blinks. "...hah?"

"Oh, so you wanna act dumb, huh?" Miu snarls, jabbing a gloved finger in his direction. "You might have everyone else fooled but *I* fucking know you killed him! Kiibo wasn't stupid enough to fall down the stairs like an idiot and I know without a doubt that you pushed him!"

"Iruma that's enough!" Kirumi tries to haul her from his room. "You can't go around throwing accusations like that, especially since we all know they aren't true-"

“Shut up, shut up, *shut up!*” Miu claws at Kirumi’s hands. “I bet that *fucker*,” Miu screeches as he points at him again, “is working with Monokuma! That’s why Monokuma said Kiibo’s death was an accident! He was *protecting* this prick. Just you wait until I get my hands on you. I’m going to wring your goddamn neck-”

Kirumi grabs Miu around the waist and starts to pull on her hard, slowly dragging her from his bed towards the door. “Whilst I understand you’re upset, Iruma, what you’re doing right now is extremely inappropriate-”

“Fuck you! Shut up! Shut the fuck up!” Miu scrambles to grab one of his whiteboards in a desperate attempt to keep herself in his room. “You don’t fucking get it! He got away with murder! He fucking got away with taking Kiibo away from me! A-And I...” Miu knocks the whiteboard over. “I had *so much* I wanted to say to Kiibo! I-I spent the night he died...I had plans for him, okay?! Spent all fucking night drawing up blueprints of upgrades I thought he would like and...”

Miu chokes on a sob as Kirumi’s expression softens. “Iruma...”

“I don’t want your fucking pity, I want you to let me teach this asshole a lesson!” Miu struggles against the maid’s grip. “So let me *go!*”

Kokichi stares blankly as Kirumi wrestles with Miu to get her out of his bedroom. His memories start to unblur, the mystery surrounding them becoming more and more solvable. When he thinks of Kiibo, he remembers the two of them standing by the outside wall. He remembers the robot stomping hard on Monokuma. He remembers Kiibo running behind him as they both chased Tsumugi up the stairs. He remembers falling and Kiibo catching him only for the robot to stumble and fall through the railings.

The revelation leaves him breathless and he plays with his scarf absentmindedly as Miu continues to scream insults at him. He’s well aware how loud she’s being and he knows that in a game like this, noise eventually attracts attention. So when he spots Tsumugi timidly poke her head into his room, he knows he shouldn’t be too surprised but seeing her causes his chest to violently tighten to the point he’s convinced that she’s somehow managed to magic all the air from the room.

She looks delighted that he’s awake and he *hates* her expression because it makes him remember even more, it makes him remember being handcuffed to the giant Monokuma head, it makes him remember being sat on a freezing cold floor for an entire night all alone. He remembers how his uniform ended up being more pink than white by the time morning came, how his legs trembled to the point he wasn’t sure he was even going to make it to his bedroom.

Everything hits him at once and even as he scrambles to keep a straight face, all of his walls fall like a house of cards caving in. His meticulously built walls that he’s spent years building fall like dominoes. His walls crash into each other and make him feel a foreign feeling of fear. He doesn’t like this, he doesn’t like this uneasy feeling crawling up and down his skin like a spider he can’t see. His throat feels tight and his stomach burns and he realises that even though he has nothing to throw up, he’s going to be sick just at the *sight* of Tsumugi standing in his doorway.

“Tojo,” he chokes out.

She’s still trying to drag Miu out of his room. Kirumi obviously either hasn’t noticed Tsumugi or doesn’t think her standing in the doorway is anything to worry about. “Iruma, please just-”

“I’m *not* leaving until I get answers!”

“Tojo,” he tries again.

Tsumugi stares at Miu in wonder. She's probably finding the fact that Miu is so distressed right now hilarious.

"I'm being serious," Kirumi says. "You need to leave."

"But I don't want to fucking leave so-"

"Tojo, I'm going to be *sick*."

He must set off some sort of instinct in Kirumi because as soon as he says that, she somehow manages to get the upper hand and leads Miu from the room by pushing her shoulders. However, Miu *did* go suspiciously still when said he was going to be sick and he wonders if the way he said it made her feel a tiny bit bad for him. Miu stares at him with an unreadable expression before clicking her tongue.

"Tch, I didn't want to talk to you anyway," Miu mutters, obviously lying but clearly trying to salvage some of her reputation. She storms off whilst Tsumugi lingers by the door.

"Shirogane, I think it's for the best if you leave too," Kirumi says as she subtly tries to usher the cosplayer away, closing the door on her slowly.

"Oh!" Tsumugi blinks before nodding. "I understand. I hope you feel better soon, Ouma."

He glares at her even as bile starts to burn his throat. Kirumi closes the door and quickly snatches up a plastic bin and presses it into his shaking hands. He mostly just hugs the bin to his chest as he tries to stop his body from trembling. Even though he thought he was going to be sick, the only thing that falls from his mouth are accidental whimpers that he desperately tries to force back down his throat. His eyes sting and he hides his face into the side of the bin.

Kirumi gently puts a hand on his shoulder but the moment she does, he jerks away instinctively and her eyes go wide before she voluntarily pulls her hand away. Quite frankly he has no idea why his body won't cooperate with him, why he's on such high alert. All that he's aware of is that he's panicking because he saw Tsumugi standing in the doorway and it's mortifying to think that just the mere sight of her is enough to set him off like this.

He clutches the bin even tighter to his chest and buries his face even further away from Kirumi's sympathetic stare, frantically trying to suck in even a single breath of air. His lungs are throbbing, his hands are shaking and all of his nerves feel like they're electric. He feels like he's going to die, no, scratch that. He feels like he *is* dying. He probably is.

Kirumi quickly realises that she's probably not going to be much help to him when he's in such a state and hesitates before quickly rushing out of the room. He hears her call out to someone but her voice sounds distant and it feels like he's back underwater, that he's sinking deeper and deeper into dark depths that he can't navigate alone. He squeezes his plastic bin even tighter, holding it like a lifeline.

His eyes twitch nervously towards the door when he realises Kirumi has left, although it seems that she's made sure he's not alone. Tenko walks into the room with a confused look on her face before she blinks at the sight of him having what is obviously a *very* bad time. He chokes back a sob as he watches her lock the door and he wants to ask her what the hell does she think she's playing at. She needs to unlock the door because he doesn't want to be trapped in here, he wants to be able to escape and go somewhere.

He needs to...he needs to find somewhere that has *air*. Clearly this room has been sucked dry,

that's why he's struggling to breathe right now. Tenko cautiously approaches him before sitting down heavily next to him on his bed, the mattress lowering because of her weight. She opens and closes her mouth before taking a deep breath in through her nose.

"Ouma," Tenko says, cautiously putting a hand on his cheek and lifting his head up so that he's looking at her, "you need to listen to Tenko carefully, okay? What happens during the next...the next half an hour is going to stay between you and Tenko. She's locked the door so no one can come in so if you want to bawl your eyes out then you can cry as much as you want. If you want to laugh then Tenko will laugh with you too. If you want to sit in silence then Tenko won't say a word. Tenko is going to do you a huge favour and turn a blind eye to whatever you decide to do."

Kokichi swallows heavily, trying to dislodge the thick lump in his throat. He turns his head to the side and Tenko sighs before taking him by surprise. She holds him to her chest and rests her chin on his head and the unexpected warmth is the final blow to tearing down his defences. He snuffles and holds her back, buries his face into one of her shoulders and *weeps*, his own shoulders bobbing up and down as Tenko becomes the sole thing holding him together right now.

He's suddenly extremely grateful that Tenko is offering him this opportunity and even though he despises how vulnerable and exposed he feels right now, as long as Tenko keeps her word that she'll forget everything he does during the next half hour, he thinks he'll cry into her shoulder until he can figure out how to hit the reset button on his emotions properly.

—

"So how did you manage to get so many people to join your organisation?"

Tenko grabs a grape from the bowl that Kirumi had delivered to the room minutes ago. She chews on her own grape thoughtfully before throwing one over to Kokichi, who catches it with his mouth with ease.

He shrugs. "What can I say? I'm just an extremely charming person."

"Hmm, yeah, Tenko is *sure* that's the reason why you have so many followers," Tenko says with a roll of her eyes. "But Tenko is being serious. How do you manage to like, tell thousands of people what to do? Doesn't it get exhausting?"

"I'm the Ultimate Supreme Leader for a reason," Kokichi answers. "If I wasn't up to leading people then I wouldn't have been given the title of Ultimate Supreme Leader in the first place. I mean, I suppose I'm just a natural at telling people what to do. I'm absolutely fantastic at barking out orders, you know?"

"Yet you're awful at following them," Tenko teases. She throws him another grape. "But what does your organisation do anyway?"

"If I told you I'd have to kill you," Kokichi responds. "And since I'm feeling particularly merciful today I think I will kindly spare you."

Tenko rolls her eyes. "What's with your uniform anyway? It isn't exactly flattering. Also is your scarf like some sort of requirement or something?"

"Yep! I need some way of knowing who is a part of my organisation!" Kokichi fiddles with the edge of his scarf. "Everyone who joins gets given one of these bad boys! They're handmade by one of my most trusted tailors so they're ethically made too. But that's just a lie. I make my enemies make them for me as a reminder that they'll never be able to get to wear one."

“Do you have lots of enemies then?”

“I mean...” Kokichi catches the next grape she throws with one of his hands. “Every organisation has a couple of enemies, right? But since I’m a pacifist I make sure we never, ever, *ever* resort to violence. I like to sort out issues with games! Winner gets their own way whilst the loser has to do the winner’s bidding for the rest of eternity!”

Tenko narrows her eyes. “What sort of games do you play?”

“Snap. Rock, Paper, Scissors. Seeing who can cross a tightrope the quickest without falling to their death. You know, the usual.”

“One of those games is clearly not like the others!” Tenko huffs. “Tenko hasn’t heard of an organisation who resolves conflict with games though. Tenko wonders if the world would be a better place if all conflicts were sorted by playing games with each other.”

“Well it depends what games people decide to play, duh,” Kokichi says. “I like to play it old school. A good ol’ game of Go Fish does wonders for the soul!”

“Right...” Tenko shoves another grape into her mouth.

“Aw man, I’ve just realised I’ve told you too much!” Kokichi says with a pout. “But you’re one of the few girls in the entire world I can tolerate so I don’t exactly want to have you killed. Hmm...”

“What’s that supposed to mean?!”

“I’ve decided! You should totally join my organisation!” Kokichi pumps his fists excitedly. “You can teach everyone how to do your Neo-Aikido! If everyone in my organisation knew how to defend themselves without having to use violence then that would really up morale!”

“Hah? You want Tenko to teach her Neo-Aikido to your organisation?” Tenko asks with a tilt of her head.

Kokichi nods eagerly. “Yep yep! I mean, you literally have to join my organisation anyway or you’ll die so you really have no other option now!”

“Tenko is fairly confident that you won’t kill her if she doesn’t join but she will think about it anyway,” Tenko responds, launching a grape at his face. He pouts and catches it before it can roll onto the floor. “Tenko hasn’t actually thought about teaching her Neo-Aikido to a large group of people before but the idea of having thousands of people be able to protect themselves in a non-violent manner sounds rather tempting.”

“You know what, how about you sleep on it then?” Kokichi suggests. “I’m oh so kindly granting you twenty four hours to think about my offer. If you respond even a second late then I’ll get my most trusted minion to take you out in your sleep!”

“Geez, thanks.” Tenko adjusts her feet on his bed. She’s currently sitting on the chair by his bed whilst using his bed as a footrest. She rocks backwards and looks up at the ceiling with a thoughtful look on her face. “So Tenko heard that Iruma let it slip that, you know, Kiibo died. Do you want Tenko to, um, fill in on any details?”

Kokichi freezes before shaking his head. “He just fell down the stairs during the middle of the night, right?”

Tenko nods. “Yeah.”

“And you all figured out how he died easily enough?”

“Well, Iruma...” Tenko clears her throat uncomfortably. “Thought you pushed him since he had blood on his leg and you were the only person at the time who also had blood on them. Tenko thinks she just wants someone to blame. It *is* kinda sad that Kiibo ended up dying *accidentally* during a killing game.”

“Mhmm...”

“You really should thank Momota when you see him next though,” Tenko suddenly says. “He carried you on his back throughout the entire trial. Monokuma wouldn’t let him clean you up since Kiibo’s body was discovered, like, a couple of minutes after you went to Momota’s room. Even though Momota did look kinda pale during the trial, he didn’t let go of you once. Maybe he’s a *little* less degenerate than most males.”

He didn’t know that. “Is that so?”

“Well, Momota was also the one who brought you to your room without your permission too,” Tenko adds. She gestures to his whiteboards. “What the heck is all this about anyway?”

Kokichi shrugs. “My room was like this when I went into it the first time. I think Monokuma personally just decided to use my room as his own personal dumping ground. Beats me what all this junk lying around means and I don’t even want to try and decipher what those whiteboards mean either.”

Tenko gives him an understanding nod. “Yeah, Tenko thinks she would get a headache trying to figure out what everything in this room means.”

Thankfully she doesn’t catch onto the fact that he’s lying. He gestures for her to throw another grape, which he catches between his teeth before chewing on it. “So...what horrible motive has Monokuma given us this time?”

Tenko instantly frowns. “He wanted to wait until you woke up to give us all our next motive. It makes Tenko nervous about what he has in store for us.”

Kokichi clicks his tongue. “Wow, how nice of him. *Not.*”

The two grin half-heartedly at each other before there’s a knock at his door. Tenko pauses before checking who knocked by looking through the peephole. “Ah, it’s Momota and Hoshi. Should I let them in?”

“Yeah, whatever.”

Kaito still looks frustratingly pale as he enters the room with a large smile whilst Ryoma offers Kokichi a small wave. “Yo.”

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t my two favourite people,” Kokichi says before poking his tongue out. “But that was just a lie. I’ve decided that Chabashira is my favourite person in the entire world now.”

“Haha! Suck it!” Tenko pumps a victorious fist.

Kaito pouts. “But why aren’t *I* your favourite person?! I’m the Luminary of the Stars!”

“I see you’re certainly doing better then,” Ryoma says as he makes himself comfortable in the large

rubber ring that Kokichi left lying on the floor near his desk. “That’s good, was starting to think you were never going to wake up.”

“I was taking a much needed beauty sleep,” Kokichi responds with a sniff.

“Which you wouldn’t have needed in the first place if you hadn’t stupidly torn your stitches,” Tenko grumbles before reluctantly dropping the subject. “Next time we all train together Tenko is going to ban Momota and Ouma from doing exercises together.”

Kaito huffs. “I-I didn’t mean to hurt him in the first place, you know?”

“How about we let sleeping dogs lie?” Ryoma suggests. “What matters is Ouma is awake now.”

“Hell yeah!” Kaito flops down onto Kokichi’s couch and kneels on it so that he’s facing the bed. “Now that you’re awake our entire crew is whole again!”

“Hope you don’t mind but we’ve been doing what Momota likes to call ‘mental training’ in your bedroom this past week,” Ryoma says apologetically. “I promise we haven’t actually gone through any of your stuff if you’re worried about that.”

“It’s all junk anyway,” Kokichi says dismissively. “I think Monokuma filled this room full of rubbish on purpose.”

“Yeah, that does sound like something Monokuma would do,” Kaito agrees. “I mean, just look at those whiteboards! There’s something about them that totally doesn’t sit right with me anyway!”

Kokichi smiles awkwardly. “Yep yep. Which is why you should totally just ignore them!”

“Way ahead of you, kid,” Ryoma says. “Besides, there’s more important things we should be focusing on now anyway.”

“Yeah, like how Monokuma is probably going to give us our next motive at any moment,” Tenko grumbles. “Tenko isn’t saying she’s not glad that Ouma woke up but Monokuma did promise that he was going to give us our motive when he does.”

“Hmm, have you guys not been trying to get hints from Monokuma about what the motive might be?” Kokichi asks curiously.

Ryoma shrugs. “Didn’t really particularly care about knowing what he has planned for us.”

“I mean, it can’t be anything too bad, right?” Kaito says. “The last motive wasn’t exactly mind-blowing.”

“But this next one might be even worse to make up for that,” Tenko points out nervously.

“We’ll just have to wait and see,” Ryoma says. “There’s no point worrying about something that hasn’t happened yet.”

“Exactly!” Kaito nods in agreement. “And since Monokuma has given us everything to unlock the entire school we can start looking for a proper exit again! Maybe we’ll find another secret passageway hidden away somewhere or something!”

“Hmm? The entire school has been unlocked?” Kokichi raises an eyebrow. “Like *all* of it?”

“Monokuma added an extra floor to the school,” Ryoma explains. “And there’s a couple more buildings outside. There’s a hangar and Iruma also got a building put next to her lab. It, ah, turned

out to be Kiibo's lab."

"Well that's awkward," Kokichi mumbles.

"By the way, I heard from Tojo earlier that Iruma gave you a bit of hassle earlier," Ryoma says.
"Are you doing okay?"

"Psh, like *Iruma* could upset me," Kokichi responds with a dismissive wave of his hand.

"Tojo also said she didn't get the chance to tell you about Kiibo's death before Iruma told you," Ryoma continues. "I don't know if you were particularly close with him but I'm sorry you had to hear about him passing in such a crude way."

Kokichi shrugs. "I've had news told to me in worse ways before."

Ryoma hums. "So you didn't find it too surprising when Iruma told you Kiibo was dead then?"

"*Hoshi*," Kaito hisses under his breath whilst Kokichi raises a brow.

"Hmm, what's *that* supposed to mean?" Kokichi asks. "I mean *of course* I was surprised when Iruma barged into my room and accused me of killing poor Kiiboy. As if I'd kill him in such a boring way by pushing him down the stairs."

How strange, it's almost as if Ryoma is trying to dig around for answers for some reason. Kokichi takes note of Ryoma's unusual behaviour.

"Monokuma said Kiibo's death was an accident so why would Ouma *not* be surprised about hearing Kiibo was dead from Iruma?" Tenko questions with a frown.

Ryoma pauses before sighing. "Yeah, you're right. My bad, I didn't mean to sound like I was accusing you of anything."

"Oh that's good because I really, *really* don't remember much from the night Kiibo died," Kokichi lies. "All I remember is that Momota had been super mean to me and tore my stitches and woke up in a pool of my own blood!" He sniffles and wipes a fake tear from his eye. "How dare you almost send me to an early grave, Momota!"

Kaito pouts. "Yeah, yeah. My bad."

"At least sound more apologetic!" Tenko glares at him. "You need to take some responsibility for what happened as well! Whilst Ouma is stupid for not telling us how severe his injury was, you're the one who caused it in the first place!"

"I already told him I'm sorry!" Kaito cries, holding his hands up in mock defeat. "T-Tell her, Ouma!"

"Hmm? I don't remember getting an apology from you..."

"Why you little-"

"Oh it fills me with joy to see you all getting along so well!"

Kokichi bristles as he spots Monokuma inside of his room and he wonders how the hell the bear managed to get inside without anyone noticing. He grabs his duvet tightly with a frown as everyone else stares at Monokuma with disgusted expressions.

“Not!” Monokuma takes another step forward. “Oh my, it’s so nice to see that you’re *finally* awake! I was worried I was about to witness two boring deaths in a row!”

“If you’re here to give us the next motive then just hurry it up already,” Tenko snaps. “Tenko doesn’t want to deal with your theatrics!”

“Well, well, well, it looks like you’ve all fallen into a nice little routine,” Monokuma says with a smile. “Have you finally gotten used to me handing out motives then? That fills my tiny little bear heart with joy!”

“Seriously, just get on with it,” Ryoma grumbles.

Monokuma bashfully kicks the floor. “I don’t know, I was thinking Ouma should apologise to you all for making you all wait so long for the next motive. He’s been rather inconsiderate making you all wait a week for something exciting to happen.”

“Hmm, I would apologise but…” Kokichi pulls a face as he sucks in a breath. “I’m not actually all that sorry so…”

“Anyway, don’t you usually hand out the motive when we’re all in one big group?” Kaito asks. “What the hell is this?”

“This new motive is a lot more…personalised,” Monokuma explains. “Now hold out your hand for just a second, spaceman.”

“Huh?” Kaito warily looks at the bear before looking at everyone else. “Why?”

“C’mon, I’m not going to hurt you,” Monokuma insists. “I would never break my own rules!”

“Oh? Is that so?” Kokichi asks.

Monokuma nods. “Yep! I am a bear of my word!”

“Somehow I doubt that,” Ryoma murmurs as he gives the bear a tired look. “What are you up to?”

“You’ll see.” Monokuma looks a little too pleased when Kaito reluctantly holds his hand out. The bear moves surprisingly quickly and Kaito yelps as a bangle is slapped onto his wrist. The astronaut then lets out a pained cry and starts to rub his wrist soothingly.

“Something just *stabbed* me!” Kaito sounds annoyed as he holds his wrist to his chest. “What the fuck is this anyway? A bracelet?”

“It’s the new motive!” Monokuma answers gleefully. “You’re all the last students who need to put their bangles on. As soon as you’re all wearing one each then I’ll explain to you all how they work.”

“Momota said that something just stabbed him. Tenko thinks she doesn’t want to put a bangle on,” Tenko responds with a scowl. “Tenko thought you said you couldn’t directly kill us!?”

“Oh relax,” Monokuma says as he passes a bangle to her. “Momota is just being a big baby.”

“But something *did* stab me!” Kaito insists and goes to pull his bangle off.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” Monokuma suddenly says, sounding a little too pleased with himself.

Ryoma sucks a breath in through his teeth as he puts his own bangle, shrugging when Tenko shoots him an incredulous look. “What? He’s clearly going to bother us until we put them on so there’s no point putting off the inevitable.”

“See! At least someone around here has a working brain!” Monokuma says before fixing Tenko and Kokichi with an impatient look. “Will the two of you hurry it up already?!”

“But Tenko has a really low pain tolerance,” Tenko weakly argues.

“And it’s obvious that something bad is going to happen once everyone has a bangle on,” Kokichi adds. “So...”

“Fine. If you both don’t put on your bangles in the next ten seconds then I’m going to set every bangle off,” Monokuma says.

“You’re going to...set them off?” Tenko nervously runs a finger across her bangle. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“If you wait long enough then you’ll find out,” Monokuma says. “Although I don’t think your friends will last very long if you do.”

“H-Hey...” Kaito lifts his wrist up to inspect his bangle a little more closely. “These are just ordinary bangles, right?”

Monokuma starts to laugh.

Tenko grits her teeth before slipping the bangle on with a battle cry, only to yelp when she also feels a small stab of pain. Kokichi grimaces before putting on his own, wincing when he feels something prick his wrist.

“Excellent,” Monokuma says before pulling out four envelopes from behind his back. Seriously, is he a magician or something? The envelopes all have their names on them and Monokuma makes sure everyone gets the right envelope. “Inside of these envelopes is either a forbidden action that you’re absolutely *not* allowed to do *or* an action you *must* do within a certain time limit. Failure to follow your instructions properly means you’ll set your bangle off and you’ll be promptly injected with poison.”

“W-What?!” Tenko looks down at her bangle with a horrified expression. “Y-You’re not serious, are you?!”

“Talk about an extreme motive,” Ryoma grumbles as he gives his own bangle a glare. “You weren’t lying when you said this motive was going to be a nightmare for us.”

“Don’t worry too much, this is a first come first served motive,” Monokuma explains. “Whilst it would be funny to watch you all set your bangles off, only one person will actually be injected with poison and that’s the first person who fails to comply with their instructions. Oh, you’re all looking at me like I’m a monster! Don’t worry, the poison I filled the bangles with kills practically instantaneously so it’s not like whoever sets their bangle off first is going to suffer for long!”

“That’s not the point!” Kaito argues. “This motive goes against your rules!”

“Hmm, but I don’t think that’s right,” Monokuma responds. “After all, it’s the poison that’s going to kill you, not me.”

“You’re the one who is making us wear the stupid bangles!” Kaito retorts. “What’s stopping us

from just taking them-”

“As if I’d let you all just take them off just like that!” Monokuma giggles. “Use your brain, Momota. If I catch any of you try to take your bangles off then you’ll be poisoned instantly!”

“How is this motive supposed to encourage us to kill each other?” Ryoma asks with a frown. “Won’t we all be more focussed on trying to follow our instructions?”

“Don’t you worry about that,” Monokuma tells him with a mischievous look in his eyes. “I wouldn’t have given you all this motive if I thought it wasn’t going to be effective.”

Kokichi watches as Kaito rips open his envelope and reads his letter inside with a growing look of frustration. The paper crumples under the astronaut’s grip. “What the hell sort of instruction is this?!”

“Are you not satisfied, Momota? I’ll happily change your instruction if you ask me nicely,” Monokuma says before grinning. “Not!”

“Tenko hates her instruction too!” Tenko looks like she’s about to burst into tears as she drops her letter onto her lap. “This is a new level of cruelty!”

“Can’t say I’m too pleased with mine either,” Ryoma admits with a frown.

Kokichi licks his lips as he opens his envelope apprehensively and unfolds the letter inside. He reads the words on his letter once, then twice, then a third time to be completely sure what he is reading is actually real.

‘Do not let the outside wall break.’

He catches Monokuma sneering at him. Kokichi blinks before promptly ripping his letter into two pieces, letting the paper flutter to the floor. “Ugh, why’d you have to give us such a *boring* motive?”

“Hah?! What the hell are you on about?!” Kaito stares at him.

“I’m saying that I think Monokuma is getting boring and predictable, giving us a motive like this,” Kokichi says. “Seriously, I think I might start crying because of how vanilla you’re being right now!”

“Oh? Are you also not pleased with your instruction, Ouma?” Monokuma asks with a knowing look on his face.

“I’m more…” Kokichi rubs his chin, “disappointed than displeased.”

“Ouma, maybe you shouldn’t be taking this motive so lightly!” Tenko hisses. “Tenko is extremely worried about accidentally not following her instruction properly-”

“I’m not,” Kokichi says.

Ryoma looks like he’s trying to fight off a headache. “Kid, at least try to take this motive more seriously-”

“Monokuma is just trying to make our lives hell,” Kokichi says. “And I’m just making it very clear that he’s going to have to try a lot harder than this to get under my skin.”

“I see, I see…” Monokuma muffles a giggle behind his paws. “Let’s see if you still feel the same

after a couple of days, shall we? Something tells me that not everyone is going to share the same sentiment as you.”

Kokichi smiles coldly at the bear as Monokuma leaves, only dropping his smile when the bear leaves his room entirely.

“Someone could’ve given us a fucking heads up about this,” Kaito grumbles as he examines his bangle with a scowl.

Tenko starts to chew on her bottom lip. “Ugh, Tenko...Tenko hates her instruction! She knows she’s going to accidentally not follow it properly and end up poisoning herself!”

“My instruction to follow is...rather irritating,” Ryoma admits as he scrunches his letter into a ball.

“I’m going to fucking destroy Monokuma,” Kaito snaps, looking like he’s seconds away from tearing his letter into tiny pieces. “Hmph, well even if my instruction is that I’m not allowed to believe in people then it’s not like Monokuma will know if I believe in people inside of my head so...*yeah*. He can *suck it*.”

“Um, Momota? Is it wise to tell us what your instruction is?” Tenko asks. “What if the wrong person finds out what it is and uses it against you?”

“Well I...” Kaito smiles tightly. “You know.”

“I want to believe in everyone in this room,” Ryoma surprisingly says, taking the words from Kaito’s mouth. “So I don’t mind letting you all know what my instruction is. Means I can rely on you all to help me out with it too actually.”

“Oh?” Kaito peers at Ryoma curiously. “Did you get an instruction telling you to do something?”

“Yeah, I have to play a game of tennis once a day,” Ryoma reveals before sighing. “Can’t say I’m best pleased with my instruction but I suppose things could be worse for me right now.”

“I can totally help you out with that!” Kaito responds excitedly. “We can turn it into a group exercise-”

Tenko clears her throat loudly as he gestures towards Kokichi. “Aren’t you forgetting something?”

“Ouma can sit on the side lines!” Kaito says and gives Kokichi an expectant look. “You don’t mind sitting in Hoshi’s lab for a little while, right?”

“As long as Tojo doesn’t hunt me down and kill me,” Kokichi answers with a shudder.

Tenko smiles bitterly. “And Tenko can help Hoshi with his instruction since it doesn’t go against hers.” She pulls a face. “Tenko’s instruction is that she’s not allowed to help any of the girls here with *anything*.”

Kaito wrinkles his nose. “Of course Monokuma gave you such a shitty instruction to follow. Don’t worry, I’ll totally help find a way for you to work around your instruction! In fact, you can tell me what to do when needed and I’ll do it for you! How about that?”

“Hmm, Tenko isn’t sure she wants Momota helping out girls in her stead,” Tenko mumbles before swallowing. “Although she does think Momota is a little less degenerate than most males so she’ll think about his offer.”

“Great!” Kaito grins before turning to Kokichi. “Well? What about your instruction? Do you need any help working around it?”

“Hmm?” Kokichi pauses before shaking his head. “Nah. My instruction is that I’m not allowed to tell a lie and I’ve never told a-”

Instantly, Ryoma, Kaito and Tenko lunge at him to cover his mouth, amusingly all shouting for him to stop at the same time. He snorts as Kaito almost falls off the couch whilst Tenko knocks her chair over due to her standing up a little too abruptly. The rubber ring Ryoma had been sitting in flips from the tennis player’s sudden movement.

“Nishishi, wow! That was close!” Kokichi giggles as Tenko removes her hand from his mouth, being the first person to reach him.

“I swear you’re going to be the death of me,” Kaito sighs as he drapes his body dramatically over the back of Kokichi’s couch.

Ryoma huffs as he sits on the end of Kokichi’s bed with an exasperated expression on his face. “One more slip up like that and I’m taping your mouth shut.”

“Maybe we should just do it anyway as a precaution,” Kaito mumbles.

“Haha! How rude!” Kokichi smiles and mentally reminds himself to hide his torn up letter as soon as he can.

Chapter End Notes

Side note - I haven't watched the Danganronpa anime but I do know that everyone had forbidden actions and bangles (or something like that.) The motive seemed convenient so I adapted it to work for my fic. Coincidentally enough I did have a vague idea that I wanted this motive to be along the lines of making it harder for Kokichi to get stuff done but I did some research, found out about the anime and decided to use the anime as inspiration.

Kokichi Ouma - Chapter 3 Part 2

Chapter Notes

I wrote this chapter quicker than usual since I'm super excited for the next couple of chapters :)

Thank you to everyone who left a comment! They really do mean a lot!

Sorry if there are any mistakes!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

After some intense nagging, Kokichi eventually manages to wrangle himself a seat at the dining table. Even though Ryoma, Tenko and Kaito all think he should stay in bed, not having to deal with him for a week clearly made them all forget how annoying he can be. Apparently continuously asking to leave his room over and over again is a very good strategy to get what he wants.

He smiles cheekily at Kirumi as he takes a seat, his smile twitching when he notices that she has a rather distressed look on her face. She's currently sitting at the dining table with her head in her hands. Her letter is face down next to her.

"Hmm? What's wrong, Tojo?" Ryoma frowns as he takes a seat next to her.

Kirumi lets out a defeated sigh. "I have been given a very...irritating instruction to follow from Monokuma. Also I must apologise, I wanted to warn you all about the motive as soon as I was given my own bangle but I couldn't."

"Huh?" Kaito's eyes flicker to Kirumi's letter. "How come?"

The maid hesitates before passing her letter to Kaito with a grimace. The astronaut reads the letter and a deep line grows between his brows.

"Woah...so you're not allowed to help anyone here with *anything*?" Kaito's hand starts to tremble.

Kirumi nods solemnly. "I am not sure how to react to this motive. It pains me as a maid not to be able to help anyone but I also don't wish to die since that will only cause problems for everyone else. However, I'm not sure if my pride can handle having to watch everyone struggle from the sidelines."

Tenko nods sympathetically. "Tenko's instruction also makes it so that she can't help much either, although Tenko's instruction is that she's not allowed to help *girls* so..."

"I swear Monokuma only gave us this motive to make us all miserable," Ryoma grumbles.

"I agree," Kirumi says tightly. "And that is why I must apologise profusely to you all for not making any dinner tonight. I'm afraid that you all must sort out your own food for the time being--"

"Woah, woah, woah!" Kaito slams a fist onto the table. "Why the hell are you apologising?! We're all capable of looking after ourselves for a while! In fact, whilst we have these bangles on I'll take

over in the kitchen, okay?”

“Just try not to burn the school down!” Kokichi teases, giggling when Kaito throws a napkin at him.

“I’ll have you know I’m an excellent cook!” Kaito insists heatedly. “My grandparents both think I’m really good at making soup!”

“...and what else?” Tenko prompts.

Kaito splutters. “S-Soup is my specialty, okay?! That’s...the only thing I’m good at making.”

Ryoma sighs. “I’m decent at cooking a couple of different dishes so I’ll help out in the kitchen too.”

“Oh thank goodness! I thought I was going to have to eat soup for the rest of my life!” Kokichi pretends to wipe some fake sweat from his forehead. Kaito looks like he’s seconds away from lunging at him.

“My soup is delicious! In fact, I’m going to make some right now!” Kaito decides before stomping into the kitchen. “And you’re not allowed any!”

“I didn’t want any anyway!”

Ryoma rubs his forehead. “Well it certainly didn’t take long for things to go back to normal.”

“You mean Ouma and Momota bickering with each other like children?” Tenko says.

“We aren’t bickering!” Kaito calls from the kitchen. There’s a loud crash as he drops several pans onto the floor. The astronaut swears loudly as he scoops them up into his arms. “And don’t make it sound like I like to argue with people!”

“Nishishi, Momota is so easy to tease,” Kokichi says.

“Honestly...” Ryoma pinches the bridge of his nose. “You’ve only been awake for five minutes and you’re already teasing everyone.”

“I’ve been awake for several hours actually,” Kokichi says, “and teasing people is my-”

“Ouma, if you’re about to tell a lie then maybe *don’t*,” Tenko says and Kokichi pouts.

Hmm, he’s sort of shot himself in the foot with his lie about his instruction. Well, he did need to tell everyone a believable lie so that they wouldn’t get suspicious. Curse his brain for not thinking up a different lie to tell. These next couple days (or maybe even weeks) are going to suck *so* hard.

Kirumi raises an eyebrow curiously. “Why is Ouma not allowed to lie?”

“Because Monokuma decided it would be funny to make my instruction to not be able to lie! What a meanie! He’s so cruel!” Kokichi hits the table with a fisted hand. “I will never forgive him for this! Next time I see him I’m going to cry all over him until he drowns!”

Tenko’s expression falls flat. “Tenko thinks she’s going to have a mini heart attack every time you speak. You always sound like you’re lying but since your bangle hasn’t gone off...”

“Well I am a professional liar, you know?” Kokichi responds, leaning forward with a smug smile on his face. “I’m very familiar with how to tell realistic lies. Not a single person in the entire

universe has been able to lie to me and get away with it. As a leader it's my responsibility to be able to smell bullshit from a mile away."

"Is that so?" Ryoma looks up at the ceiling with a hard to decipher look in his eyes.

"Yep!" Kokichi obnoxiously pops the 'p' very loudly. "Although it pains me that you hadn't figured that out already! I thought we were friends, Hoshi!"

Ryoma narrows his eyes, giving Kokichi's bangle in particular a dry stare. "Oh? So you're admitting that we're friends? I thought I was just a dangerous murderer in your eyes."

"Well..." Kokichi hums to himself. "I suppose *allies* is a more appropriate term. Silly me for saying we were friends!"

"Right..." Ryoma mumbles in a tone that suggests he doesn't completely believe in what Kokichi is saying. "So does that apply to everyone else then? That you're only allies with us all and not friends?"

"It's kind of childish to say that you want to be friends with people out loud, you know?" Kokichi responds. "We're not children and we're also literally in the middle of a killing game. I think people who openly admit that they're friends with people here are just raising their own death flags."

"Tenko thinks you've clearly not had any friends before if that's how you perceive friendship," Tenko says rather brutally. "And there's nothing wrong with admitting you're friends with people. You're Tenko's friend and so is Hoshi. And Tojo..." Tenko visibly hesitates as she scrunches her nose up at the bangle on her wrist. "Um, will Tenko die if she says Tojo is her friend?"

"Sheesh, you're all worrying too much about this motive," Kokichi drawls out. "Why would Monokuma set your bangle off for you saying you're friends with Tojo?"

"Because Tenko doesn't know if saying that counts as helping a girl because what if Tojo is secretly lonely and finds Tenko's words comforting?!" Tenko's eyes go wide with worry. "And Tenko accidentally ends up helping her improve her self esteem by admitting we're friends out loud so Monokuma thinks that Tenko is going against her instruction-"

"Geez, even I think you need to chill out," Ryoma says. "Ouma's right, I think we all need to relax a little. I know this new motive isn't what any of us want but you're going to drive yourself crazy by doubting yourself over every little thing."

"Whilst that is true..." Kirumi smiles grimly. "It is important that I'm personally on high alert with my instruction. My natural instinct is to automatically help people and one small slip up will result in my death."

"If you're going to be such a cry-baby about it then just stay in your room until the motive is over, duh," Kokichi suggests, holding his hands up when he earns himself three flat stares. "Woah, tough crowd! Here I am suggesting practical solutions and you're all looking at me as if I've just kicked a puppy."

"Tojo shouldn't have to lock herself in her room to keep herself safe," Tenko grumbles.

"I don't plan to hide myself away," Kirumi adds. "I'm simply...wary, that's all. I do not wish to cause everyone issues by dying. After all, Monokuma will probably make you all do a class trial just to point out the obvious and I wouldn't want to put you all through such a pointless ordeal."

“Hey, don’t act like you dying would just be an inconvenience for us,” Tenko says with a frown. “Because...” She grasps her air in front of her in frustration. “*Every* life is precious, whether you’re a boy, girl or whoever you are.”

“You’re a person before you’re a maid, Tojo,” Ryoma says. “Has no one ever told you that before?”

Her silence is depressing. Kirumi clears her throat. “Please don’t take my lack of a response as a bad thing. I am well aware of my own worth. If I didn’t enjoy being a maid then I wouldn’t be one, it’s as simple as that.”

Whilst she sounds like she’s telling the truth, it does make Kokichi wonder if Kirumi is just some sort of masochist for continuing to be a maid despite the lack of payoff. “Don’t you ever, like, wish people would do stuff for you though? Doesn’t it get boring constantly cleaning up after people?”

“Being a maid isn’t just about cleaning,” Kirumi responds with a sudden flash of determination in her eyes. “It’s about helping others so that they can reach their full potential. I have already decided that I want to selflessly devote my life to helping everyone around me. Whilst some people think the path I have chosen for myself is pitiful, I alone decide what I want to do with my life.” She clasps her hands together tightly. “It...upsets me that this motive has reduced me to nothing but a stray maid.”

“Stray maid?” Ryoma repeats with a puzzled expression.

Kirumi nods. “Yes, I am like a stray animal. If I can’t be a maid then...”

“You do realise this motive isn’t going to last forever, right?” Kokichi points out, resting his chin on a cupped hand. “Seriously, you’re acting like the world is ending. You can go back to being a maid once this silly little motive is over and done with.”

“For the motive to conclude, someone must die,” Kirumi responds. “And-”

“You’re wearing some hardcore rose-coloured glasses if you think Kiiboy’s gonna be the last victim of this killing game,” Kokichi says, ignoring Tenko’s scandalised look that appears instantly on her face because of his words. “And with a motive like this it wouldn’t surprise me if someone ends up screwing up at some point.”

Ryoma sighs. “Kid, I know you have a point but-”

“I’m just saying it as it is,” Kokichi quickly interjects. “I personally think whining over something you can’t change isn’t going to help anyone. Might as well just suck it up and get on with things.”

Better yet, it would be excellent if everyone realised that acting so visibly depressed is what Monokuma wants. It’s what Tsumugi wants. After metaphorically giving his emotions a hard reset earlier, he plans to not give his captors the satisfaction of being visibly disgruntled. He hopes his little breakdown with Tenko earlier is enough to keep Tsumugi off his back for a little while. It wouldn’t surprise him if she’s watching his momentary lapse of strength over and over in her stupid little lair. Whatever, big deal. He’ll just graciously take the huge L and get on with things.

Tenko’s jaw tightens as she impatiently taps her fingers against the table over and over again. “Tenko wishes she didn’t have to just ‘suck it up’ though.”

“Geez, we’ve been in this killing game for how long now? Nearly two weeks?” Kokichi purses his lips. “And you still haven’t wrapped your head around the fact that things aren’t going to magically get better just because you wish you don’t have to deal with Monokuma and his BS?”

“Almost forgot how brutal you can be,” Ryoma sighs before tugging on his hat with a grimace. “But I’m afraid he’s not wrong, Chabashira. I agree that it’s annoying that we just have to suck things up for now but sometimes you’ve gotta do things you don’t particularly like to survive.”

“I mean, it’s not like your instruction makes it so you have to kill anyone either so things could totally be a lot worse right now,” Kokichi oh so helpfully points out.

Tenko’s eyes shine suspiciously. “If Tenko’s instruction was that she had to hurt anyone here then she’d rather just let her bangle poison her.”

“Maybe we should steer away from pointless what ifs,” Ryoma says, shaking his head at Kokichi when the leader opens his mouth. “I agree that we have no other alternative but to just deal with this motive head on but that also doesn’t mean we should torture ourselves thinking about how things could be worse.”

Kirumi takes a heavy breath in through her nose before sighing. “That’s right. I’m mortified that I’ve allowed myself to be so affected by Monokuma’s motive so-”

“Wasn’t hinting for you to apologise either,” Ryoma says. “It’s...It’s fine that you’re upset about your instruction. I just think we should take this motive on the chin and, well, get on with things.”

“Woah, spoken like a true seasoned prisoner!” Kokichi says with a smile.

He thinks his smile would’ve lasted for quite some time if Tsumugi hadn’t decided to suddenly enter the dining room. His demeanour instantly shifts into something much more sour as he instinctively shuffles his chair a little closer to the person he’s sitting next to, which happens to be Kirumi. The maid looks at him curiously but doesn’t say anything when he mumbles out an apology for getting her skirt caught between their chairs.

For once Tsumugi doesn’t do something stupid like sit down next to him and instead places herself next to Tenko, smiling grimly at the aikido master when she spots the bangle on her wrist. “So Monokuma made you put one on too, huh?”

“Only because no one warned us about them!” Kokichi says with a snuffle, cradling his wrist to his chest. “Poor Tojo couldn’t tell us since she would’ve ended up poisoning herself but that doesn’t explain why you kept your mouth shut! How could you, Shirogane?!”

There is a flicker of amusement in the cosplayer’s eyes that is quickly veiled with fake concern. “I- I was too stunned to even think about warning everyone else. I’m sorry that I didn’t give you all a heads up.”

Ryoma sighs. “Don’t worry about it. It’s not like we had the option to not put them on anyway.”

“Nope, we technically did,” Kokichi points out. “But out of the kindness of my heart I decided to put my entire life on the line and put my bangle on even though Monokuma gave me an easy out!”

“Really?” Tsumugi blinks.

Tenko huffs. “Well, Monokuma didn’t actually give us an easy out. He just told us that he’d set everyone else’s bangles off if we didn’t put ours on.”

Kokichi pouts. “Ugh, it pains me that-”

“Ouma,” Tenko says warningly. “No lying, remember?”

“Whoopsie! My bad!” Kokichi grins as he rests his hands behind his head. “You totally just saved my life, Chabashira! I’ll have to find some way to make it up to you!”

“Oh? Why can’t Ouma lie?” Tsumugi asks with a tilt of her head.

Kokichi leans back on his chair with a satisfied smile. “Because my dear Shirogane, my instruction is that I can’t tell a lie or I’ll be poisoned to death! Isn’t Monokuma *so* cruel for making my instruction so hard! I’ve already almost slipped up several times now!”

Tsumugi pauses as she looks at him with an unreadable expression before humming. “I see. I suppose Monokuma is cruel for taking away your ability to lie. I hope for your sake that you don’t end up saying the wrong thing then.”

There is something mildly satisfying about being the cause of Tsumugi’s frown. Surely she didn’t expect him to tell everyone that his actual instruction is that he can’t let the outside wall break, right? After all, if he did then...

...hmm, what would the consequences actually be? It was pure instinct to lie about his instruction because why on earth would he give anyone the chance to blackmail him? Although now that he thinks about it...would Ryoma, Tenko or Kaito do such a thing to him? He only lied to them out of pure habit. He lied to them even though Kaito had protected him and Tenko had comforted him. Ryoma...is a different story but there’s something different about Ryoma. Did he miss some sort of development with him or something? Maybe Ryoma and Kaito had some sort of heart to heart whilst he was asleep.

Still, his real instruction is a playing card he’d rather keep close to his chest for now. Whether he likes it or not, the wall is still a viable option for him to pick when it comes to trying to end the killing game. Although now that he thinks about it, it is pretty suspicious *why* Monokuma, and let’s face it, Tsumugi, picked his actual instruction. From the sounds of it, Monokuma put a lot of thought into this motive, specifically a lot of thought into how he can use it against Kokichi himself.

Causing everyone so much distress was probably the secondary reason as to why Monokuma designed such deadly bangles in the first place. Kokichi bets *all* of his Monocoins that the main reason Monokuma made this motive was to back him into a corner. Well, even further into a corner. Kokichi bitterly thinks about the fact that he’s been in a metaphorical corner for a very long time now.

It’s unfortunate that Monokuma now knows that there is another way to end the game without following his rules. Sure, Kokichi is confident that if the killing game ends as it’s supposed to and continues until there’s two people left, then those two people will get to leave. And okay sure, it *was* his initial plan to let the game run its course and make sure Tsumugi was at least one of the two survivors but, hmm, how does he put this without sounding like a...like a softy.

He has grown rather...tragically fond of a couple of people. He’s realised that he’d find it...*regrettable* if some of the people he’s met here were to die. He’s already lost Kiibo and, well, he’d never admit it out loud but that...leaves him feeling particularly disappointed. Dare he even say upset? He’s not one for openly admitting his fondness for people out loud but Kiibo was...certainly a trusted ally in the end. A friend.

Despite his instruction, he still thinks the most convenient way to end the game is to take the wall down.

A loud crash snaps him back into reality. Kokichi blinks as he directs his head towards the source

of the crash, which is towards the kitchen. He raises an eyebrow when he realises that no one has moved from the table whilst he was spaced out, meaning only one person could have made the noise.

“Momota?” Tenko calls out, taking the words straight from his mouth. “Is everything okay?”

He frowns when Kaito doesn’t respond and stands up along with everyone else to go into the kitchen and check on the astronaut. He peers over the kitchen counter and feels his stomach drop. He hears Tenko let out a horrified gasp as she also spots Kaito sprawled out on the kitchen floor.

She practically vaults over the counter to reach the astronaut, kneeling down next to him whilst Ryoma quickly joins her. Kokichi notices Kirumi’s hands trembling by her sides and realises that she must be upset that she can’t do anything to help. He smiles almost sympathetically at her before standing by Kaito’s feet, knowing that he probably won’t be much help if he also kneels down on the floor. He’s vaguely aware that Tsumugi is somewhere behind him but blocks her out for now.

“Momota? Momota, can you hear me?” Tenko asks as her hands hover near the astronaut’s shoulders nervously. She chews her bottom lip. “Hoshi, why isn’t he responding?”

Ryoma frowns as he presses his fingers against Kaito’s wrist and waits, letting out a heavy sigh after a couple of moments. “He’s still got a pulse.”

“What the heck is wrong with him?” Tenko murmurs before sucking in a sharp breath. “H-Hoshi, there’s blood coming from his mouth!”

Uh oh. Kokichi grimaces as Ryoma tilts Kaito’s head to the side to get a better look. The frown on the tennis player’s face deepens at the sight of blood trickling down Kaito’s chin. He must’ve tried to hold a cough in for a little too long.

“Coughing up blood is totally not normal!” Tenko mumbles to herself as she spots a speck of blood on the floor. “Tenko knows that one of the new labs that opened up has poison inside so does that mean-”

“Everything he’s eaten today was made by Tojo and we all ate the same food,” Ryoma says. “I don’t think he’s coughing up blood because he’s been poisoned.”

“Maybe you should check his bangle just in case?” Tsumugi suggests fretfully, wringing her hands close to her chest.

Ryoma carefully rolls Kaito’s jacket sleeve up before shaking his head. “Nah, no signs of his bangle going off.”

“Then...why is he coughing up blood?” Tenko asks before her eyes go wide. “Wait, is Momota sick?”

“What sort of illness causes someone to cough up blood?” Kirumi murmurs most likely to herself.

Kokichi pulls a face as he clears his throat awkwardly, looking away when Ryoma directs his frown at him. “Is there something you want to share with the rest of us, Ouma?”

“...I dunno.” The leader shrugs as Ryoma continues to stare at him with an expression that suggests he doesn’t entirely believe him. However, he looks away when Kaito starts to cough and quickly turns the astronaut’s head to the side.

“Maybe we should move him somewhere more comfortable?” Tsumugi says. “I don’t think leaving him to lie on the kitchen floor is doing him any favours.”

“Just gotta make sure he didn’t hurt anything when he fell,” Ryoma says. “Chabashira, do you mind moving out of the way for a second?”

“O-Oh, sure!” Tenko pulls herself up from the floor and fiddles with her bow skittishly as the tennis player checks for any broken bones. “Tenko...doesn’t understand what’s wrong with Momota. Tenko did notice that Momota has been looking rather pale these last couple days but she didn’t think he was so bad that he’d start coughing up blood!”

Ryoma looks unusually frustrated about something as he checks around Kaito’s head. “I knew there was something wrong with him but he always dismissed me when I tried to ask. Didn’t think he was hiding something like this though.”

“There...could be a chance this is the first time he’s coughed up blood though,” Tsumugi timidly points out. “Um, unless...”

“He’s not been looking well for a while and I wouldn’t put it past Momota to hide something like this from all of us,” Ryoma says. “Don’t want to talk bad about him but he does get rather intense about anyone asking if he’s okay.”

“Typical male,” Tenko murmurs, although there is a distinct lack of anger in her words. “Well, is he okay to move?”

“Think so,” Ryoma answers. “Are you okay with pulling him up by yourself? I’d help but, you know, there’s a bit of a height difference between you, me and Momota.”

“I’ll help-” Tsumugi tries to take a step forward but Kokichi blocks her subtly with his foot.

“Tenko is fine lifting Momota by herself,” she says as she drapes the astronaut’s arm over her shoulder and starts to lift him slowly to his feet. Kaito mumbles a couple of times but it’s clear he’s out cold. Tenko huffs as she readjusts her grip and allows Kaito to lean on her heavily. By some miracle, Kaito manages to stay on his feet.

“Are you doing okay?” Ryoma asks.

Tenko nods. “Yep! Tenko will take him to his room so...” She stumbles ever so slightly. Kokichi notices Kirumi’s hands twitch helplessly. “Don’t worry, Tenko won’t let him fall!”

Ryoma opens the door for her and watches with barely concealed worry as the aikido master leads Kaito out of the room. He looks back at the small splatter of blood on the kitchen floor and sighs loudly, pulling out a worn out looking box of cigarette sweets from his pocket. “So...”

“Has he been ill this entire time?” Tsumugi wonders as she timidly watches the door close. “He’s plainly not well, is he?”

“Obviously not,” Ryoma says. “Can’t tell if I’m the fool for not noticing that he was this bad sooner or if Momota is the idiot for hiding something like this from all of us.”

“I hope what he has isn’t infectious,” Tsumugi mumbles, apologetically holding her hands up when Ryoma glares at her. “W-What? I was only wondering.”

Kirumi’s lips go thin as she sucks in a sharp breath. “What’s more important is making sure Momota is okay. I...” She flinches. “I...don’t know what to do though.”

“Not much you can do honestly,” Ryoma reassures her. “Tojo, don’t look so worried. Momota isn’t going to hold it against you for not being able to help him. Besides, I’ve got a suspicion someone in this room might know a little more about Momota’s illness than they’re letting on.”

“Hmm?” Kokichi smiles as he rests his hands behind his head. “What are you looking at me for, Hoshi?”

“Kid, I’m being serious,” Ryoma says. “You looked like you knew something earlier and...” He wrinkles his nose. “Look, you don’t have to tell us everything but if you know what’s wrong with Momota then-”

“I don’t actually *really* know what’s wrong with him,” Kokichi says with a shrug.

“...but you’ve seen him cough up blood before, right?” Ryoma asks.

Kokichi pulls a face. “Maybe.”

Ryoma stares at him with a sigh before pinching the bridge of his nose. “Honestly, it’s almost funny how alike you both are...”

“Hah? What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Doesn’t matter, kid,” Ryoma says. “Well, if no one here knows what’s actually wrong with him then I guess we’ll just have to wait for him to wake up to ask him.” He checks the time and bites the inside of his mouth. “Although looking at the time I think I need to start thinking about fitting a game of tennis in before it gets too late.”

Tsumugi raises an eyebrow. “Why?”

“My...” Ryoma pauses as he looks at Tsumugi with a difficult to read expression. “Well, let’s just say I have an instruction I need to do so I don’t set my bangle off.”

“Oh.” Tsumugi rubs her own bangle with her thumb. “So your instruction is that you have to do something, huh?”

“Yep...” Ryoma awkwardly looks away. “Feel kinda bad ditching Momota to do something else though...”

“Don’t worry about that!” Kokichi tells him. “Since Tojo can’t help and Shirogane has no experience with dealing with Momota, I shall kindly go and keep an eye on him since you’ll need Chabashira’s help with doing your instruction, right?”

“Oh...yeah, her help would be appreciated,” Ryoma realises. “But kid, you’ve literally just woken up-”

“Quit worrying, I’ll be fine,” Kokichi says. “No, we’ll *both* be fine! All Momota needs is some rest anyway so all I’ve got to do is make sure he doesn’t escape from his bed.”

Ryoma hesitates. “But-”

“No buts!” Kokichi says as he leaves the room before Ryoma can argue with him anymore. “I’ll tell Chabashira to meet you in your lab, okay?”

As the dining room doors close, he hears Ryoma sigh to himself and misses the sympathetic smile Kirumi offers the tennis player.

Kokichi realises how ironic it is that he's now the one waiting for Kaito to wake up. It's only him and Kaito in the astronaut's bedroom. Tenko left to help Ryoma play a game of tennis, promising to return once they were both done.

His leg bounces as he watches Kaito with half lidded eyes, his own exhaustion making keeping watch a little more challenging than appreciated. If things weren't so, how to put this bluntly, *shit* right now, he's more than confident he wouldn't be the one sitting here right now. He can easily imagine Kirumi being the one hovering over the astronaut whilst Ryoma and Tenko watch with worry from the couch. He'd probably be in his bed, although he doubts he'd be asleep.

Kaito groans and Kokichi quickly veils the worry from his eyes so he doesn't give Kaito any ammunition to use against him later. If Kaito knew how worried he is right now then he'd make a big deal about it. He might even try to make out that the only reason why he's worried is because the two of them are friends and *ugh*...he thinks he might trigger a migraine if he thinks about it for too long.

When Kaito's eyes finally open, Kokichi stretches a wide smile onto his face with practised ease. Understandably, Kaito stares at him for a couple of moments with a very confused look on his face before springing himself up into a sitting position a little too quickly. Kokichi almost falls out of his chair at the sudden movement.

"Woah, woah, woah! Are you trying to give me a heart attack, spaceman?" Kokichi rests a hand on his own chest. "Geez..."

"How'd I..." Kaito blinks slowly before rubbing some sleep from his eyes. Then his hands go still. "Aw *hell*, don't tell me that I..." He looks at Kokichi nervously. "Don't tell me I passed out in front of everyone."

"Okay, I will not tell you that you totally passed out in front of everyone," Kokichi says. "Only because you passed out in the kitchen, which is technically not in front of everyone so-"

"Fuck..." Kaito rubs his mouth and frowns when there's no blood on his sleeve. "Did I cough up any-"

"Blood?" Kokichi finishes for him. "Hmm, yeah, about that-"

"For fucks sake..." Kaito gives the ceiling a withering glare. "This isn't happening..."

"It kinda is..." Kokichi very helpfully says, smiling innocently when Kaito directs his glare towards him. "Geez, there's no need to look at me like that. I'm not the one who hid the fact they were ill from everyone."

He notices that Kaito's hands are trembling. "No chance of any damage control then?"

"The chances of you lying your way out of this one are very slim unfortunately," Kokichi tells him. "I mean, not to rub salt into the wound but I'm pretty sure Hoshi already knew something was up with you anyway. You nose diving onto the kitchen floor all but confirmed his suspicions."

Kaito swears loudly. "Everyone is just going to make a big deal out of nothing! I mean, yeah, I get it. Coughing up blood isn't a good thing but I'm fine! I am fine. I just...had a dizzy spell. Yeah, that's what I'll tell them. I'll just say I got a little too hot in the kitchen so I ended up passing out-"

"Momota," Kokichi says gently. "You're grasping at straws here. Quite a few of us saw the blood

you coughed up on the floor and I'm pretty sure Chabashira was like seconds away from crying when she saw you."

Kaito clears his throat with a guilty expression. "S-She's just a little sensitive. Next time I see her I'll tell her-"

"That you're fine?" Kokichi raises an eyebrow. "Do you really think she's going to believe you? She's the one who dragged you to your room, you know? Let me guess, you don't even remember her taking you here, do you?"

"How can I remember something like that if I wasn't conscious to know that she..." Kaito runs a hand down his face. "Shit...Ouma, *please* just tell me I'm dreaming right now. This is just...just a nightmare, right? Pinch me."

"I'm not pinching you, Momota," Kokichi says. "Did you actually think you were going to be able to hide this from everyone? Have you looked in a mirror lately? You look dreadful."

"I'm pale because-"

"You're ill," Kokichi says. "Are you purposefully trying to make this conversation go around in circles?"

"I just..." Kaito hides his mouth behind a fisted hand as he stares at his lap with a lost expression. "I don't *know*, okay? I don't know what you want me to say."

Kokichi sighs loudly and stands up, raising an amused eyebrow when Kaito stares at him incredulously when he gestures for the astronaut to budge to the side.

"Hey, what are you doing?!"

"I'm getting comfortable," Kokichi answers as he sits down on the bed next to Kaito. It's a tight squeeze, especially since Kaito's bed is only designed for one person. For once Kokichi is grateful that he's on the smaller side. He slips under Kaito's duvet and pulls it to his chest with a dramatic huff. "Geez, at least try to accommodate me."

"Why are you-"

"Looks like you've tragically forgotten that I'm also not feeling all that well myself," Kokichi says with a sniff, smirking as Kaito pales for reasons that are not related to his illness. "Oh don't look so pathetic, you've literally just woken up from passing out and I know from experience that you're probably very groggy right now. I'll let it slide just this once that you forgot about me and my life threatening injuries."

Kaito somehow manages to look even more guilty as he ducks his head to the side. "Fuck, Ouma, my bad-"

"I didn't slip into your bed to lecture you, dumbass," Kokichi responds dismissively, shuffling his body around so that he's lying on his uninjured side. He places his elbow onto Kaito's pillow and props his head up with a cupped hand. "Hey Momo-chan, let's have a sleepover."

"Hah?!" Kokichi chuckles at Kaito's sudden whiplash. "B-But there's not enough room for both of us in this bed to-"

"Of course there's plenty of room!" Kokichi says as if he's not one wrong shuffle away from falling off the bed. "And since I'm your guest you have to accommodate me!"

“You’re the one who got into my bed!” Kaito hastily points out.

“Well I don’t see you trying to kick me out.”

Kaito blanches. “B-Because you’re hurt!”

“Hmm, you keep telling yourself that’s the reason you haven’t banished me yet,” Kokichi says. “Now, due to circumstances I have oh so kindly taken it upon myself to put myself in charge of babysitting duty, so do me a favour and not do something ridiculous like get out of bed because I’m far too tired to chase after you.”

“*Babysitting duty?!*” Kaito glares at him before pouting. “And you shouldn’t be here since you’re not doing well yourself. I mean, we both know this isn’t my first rodeo so...”

“But I don’t want to move because I’ve just gotten *super* comfortable,” Kokichi whines as he tugs Kaito’s duvet a little tighter over himself, grinning when he ends up pulling on the duvet a little too much and removing it from Kaito’s body. “Whoops.”

“You’re a pain in the ass,” Kaito huffs as he wrestles some of the duvet back. “How do you have the energy to be so annoying in the first place?”

“I’ve just woken up from a week-long nap so of course I’ve got plenty of energy to spare,” Kokichi says with a roll of his eyes. “Also I always make sure to conserve some emergency energy so I can annoy you at any given time.”

Kaito narrows his eyes at him. “Sounds about right.”

“C’mon, you should lie back down,” Kokichi suggests. “My neck hurts from having to crane my head up to look at you. At least try and make things a little easier for me.”

Kaito huffs but surprisingly relents rather easily and also lies on his side so that they’re both facing each other. “There, is that better?”

“Yep! My neck thanks you tremendously!” Kokichi tells him. He readjusts his hand ever so slightly. “By the way I was totally serious about us having a sleepover! Your bed is a lot more comfortable than mine so I think I’ll stay here tonight. And tomorrow night too. In fact I think I’ll just take over your bed.”

“Don’t you dare,” Kaito grumbles and lightly flicks his nose. He looks rather put off as he makes it obvious that he’s trying to look anywhere but him. “You don’t have to do this, you know? Pretending that you’re here for a...” He pulls a face. “For a sleepover when you’re only really here to keep an eye on me.”

“Nope, I’m definitely here for a sleepover with Momo-chan,” Kokichi insists.

“Dude, I’m not stupid,” Kaito says, slapping a hand over Kokichi’s mouth when he catches the mischievous look in the leader’s eyes. “And I know you were about to tell a joke so don’t. You’re the one who needs looking after right now. My...cold is gonna go away eventually, you know? You should be focussing on looking after yourself-”

“Momota, do you really think I would be here if I thought I wasn’t going to make it through a single conversation with you?” Kokichi says. “And why do you think I got into bed with you? Just because you don’t want me around-”

“Hey, I didn’t say anything about not wanting you around!” Kaito frowns at him. “What gave you

that idea?"

"Well you're clearly trying to get rid of me-"

"Not because I don't like you," Kaito says. He chews his bottom lip before sighing. "I waited ages for you to wake up and I just didn't expect this to happen. Everyone should be worried about you right now, not me."

"And here I thought you would love having all of the attention," Kokichi teases.

"Not when it comes to..." Kaito looks oddly vulnerable as he clears his throat. "My illness."

"Ah..." Kokichi smiles grimly. "Are you not the slightest bit relieved everyone knows you're ill now though? Means you don't have to hide it anymore."

"Think I would've preferred everyone not knowing," Kaito admits quietly. "Everyone has enough to worry about already without adding me into the mix. Besides, it's not like anyone can help me anyway. It's not like there's some magic medicine out there that's going to fix everything."

"Hmm, I suppose not," Kokichi agrees.

There's a distant look in Kaito's eyes as the astronaut smiles bitterly at him. "I just...find it easier to pretend that I'm not ill. You don't know what it's like to have people treat you differently because you're ill. I don't want to be seen as some fragile person who needs to be wrapped in cotton wool."

"Oh yeah, that would totally make you look weird," Kokichi says. "Although I can imagine you wearing a cape made of cotton wool. I bet you'd find a way to stitch some starry fabric onto it so it matches your jacket."

Kaito blinks before grinning proudly. "I'll have you know I actually designed the inside of my jacket myself! Well, you know, I only stitched some fabric onto it but I think it looks cool!"

"No wonder I thought your jacket looked clumsily made," Kokichi teases, ducking his head when Kaito swats his hair. "I'm joking, I'm joking!"

"You better be," Kaito says, although there is a distinct lack of threat in his voice. His expression softens and something flutters strangely in Kokichi's chest. Huh, well *this* is a new feeling. "Look...I get that you're just joking around to make me feel better and whilst I appreciate it, I still think you should go back to your own room. You're not well yourself so-"

"But I've just gotten into the optimal position," Kokichi says. "Besides, consider me looking after you payback for you lying for me earlier-"

Kaito frowns at him. "Hold on just a second, I didn't lie for you because I wanted something in return, Ouma. I lied because I *believe* in you. Look, I don't know how much you actually remember about the night of Kiibo's death but I know without a doubt that you didn't kill him so that's why I lied for you."

It's Kokichi's turn to be uncomfortable as he looks away. "You do realise how stupid you sound, right? I turn up to your bedroom door right before the morning announcement covered in blood during the same timeframe Kiibo is found dead. You should've been more suspicious of me-"

"Well I was right in the end though, wasn't I?" Kaito argues, pulling a face when Kokichi continues to avoid looking at him. To the leader's surprise, Kaito gently puts a hand on his cheek

and guides his face so that they're back to looking at each other. "Which means I was *right* to believe in you."

"But why?" Kokichi asks. He swears Kaito's hand is burning his skin. "I won't get it unless you put it into words. You have literally no reason to believe in me." Tsumugi's cruel words echo in his ears. Didn't she say the only reason why Kaito is even giving him the time of day is because the people he was supposed to believe in aren't here? He tries to look away. "You have an entire world full of people to believe in so why pick to believe in me? Why now?"

"Because," Kaito says and Kokichi waits for him to elaborate.

Kaito does not elaborate. Kokichi stares at him incredulously. "*Because?*"

"Geez, I don't think I've ever met someone as naïve as you before," Kaito grumbles and Kokichi bristles.

"Naïve? Did...did you just call me naïve?" Kokichi asks a little too defensively. He scoffs. "I'll have you know I'm *not*."

"Have you ever believed in someone before just because you wanted to?" Kaito suddenly asks. "You shouldn't just expect people to give you reasons to believe in them, you know? Sometimes you've gotta take risks and yeah, sometimes you end up making the wrong choice and end up getting hurt but--"

"We come from completely different backgrounds," Kokichi mutters. "Just because you got lucky with me not killing Kiibo doesn't mean--"

"If you end up betraying me in the end then that'll be my problem alone," Kaito says. "But something tells me that you're not about to stab a knife into my back anytime soon."

Kokichi rolls onto his back with a huff, resting his hands on his stomach as he stares up at the ceiling. "Oh yeah? And why do you think that?"

"Dude, you've literally just wrestled your way into my bed so you could get comfortable. I'm fairly confident I know what your priorities are right now," Kaito points out. "And answer me this, Ouma. If you find believing in someone so bizarre then why did you go along with the lie I told you earlier? You could've told Tojo anything yet decided to tell her the lie *I* told you to use. How about *you* put into words why you did that, hmm?"

Kaito's question leaves him feeling winded. He's suddenly very glad that he's on his back since it gives him a couple of seconds to school his face from looking so surprised. He doesn't even need to be looking at Kaito to know that the astronaut is staring at him expectantly and he can practically feel the smugness rolling from Kaito. Out of everything, he did not expect Kaito to throw his own question back into his face.

He very quickly realises why Kaito gave him a one word answer.

Kokichi bites his tongue as he struggles to create a single thought. His mind has gone completely blank and to his horror he realises it's because he doesn't really have an answer. He could easily use the fact he was groggy and had just woken up from a week long sleep as a scapegoat but he knows Kaito wouldn't accept that as the truth.

So, in very typical Kokichi Ouma fashion, he closes his eyes and lets out the most obnoxiously loud snore to change the subject. "Sorry, can't answer. I'm sleeping. I'm *snooooooring*."

He cracks an eye open ever so slightly and catches Kaito spluttering, his face turning red as he looks down at Kokichi with a look of disbelief, which Kokichi finds hilariously ironic. He smiles to himself as he closes his eyes once again and rests his hands on his stomach. He waits for Kaito to merely sigh in defeat, to lie down himself and maybe go to sleep. What he doesn't expect is a sudden weight on his waist and his eyes fly open as he realises Kaito is practically pinning him to his bed.

Kaito looms over him with a challenging look in his eyes. His brain all but short circuits as Kaito slams both of his hands by each side of his head and he very quickly concludes that Kaito clearly doesn't see a problem with the positioning of his body. He figures he should probably be more concerned but despite the very sudden surprise of Kaito basically sitting on him, he doesn't actually really feel like he's in any danger. He's more baffled than anything.

"Uh..." Kokichi looks from side to side with a slight smile. "Whatcha up to, spaceman?"

"Proving a point," Kaito responds. "So stop trying to ignore me and just accept that the only reason why you chose to use my lie is because a tiny part of you believes in me whether you realise it or not."

"I used your lie because it was convenient, that's all," Kokichi says before snaking a hand through Kaito's arm and holding his bangle to Kaito's face. "And don't accuse me of lying either."

Kaito narrows his eyes. "Why do you think I told you to use that lie in the first place? I didn't give you such a convenient lie to tell for fun, you know?"

Kokichi clicks his tongue. Ugh, Kaito annoyingly has a point. "You told me to use that lie to protect yourself-"

"The whole reason I lied in the first place was to protect *you*, not me," Kaito says firmly and something squirms in Kokichi's chest. "If I told everyone that you were hurt *before* coming to my room then you wouldn't have stood a chance during the trial. I lied to make sure no one had any reason to suspect you. Why are you so upset about me lying?"

"I don't care that you lied. I *care* about the fact you *lied* for *me*," Kokichi says before quickly realising his words can very easily be taken the wrong way. He tries to backtrack. "Well, no, I don't care that you lied for me, you can do whatever you want-"

"Ouma," Kaito sighs before pulling his face away from Kokichi's own. He continues to straddle him lightly. "Quit panicking before you set your bangle off. Pretty sure Monokuma just gave you one hell of a freebie for not activating your bangle right now."

Kokichi bristles. "Shut up."

"No," Kaito says firmly. "I want you to listen to me, Ouma. I. Believe. In. You. Because. I Want. To." He rubs the back of his head with a huff. "Sometimes people don't need an elaborate reason to want to believe in someone or something but I think you already know that, don't you? You picked to believe in me and you're not used to doing something so out of your comfort zone, which is why you're lashing out now. But please just be honest with me. Do you *actually* regret choosing to believe in me?"

He's only been rendered speechless a handful of times in his life and he's about to add to that very small list. Kokichi makes sure that his expression is blank and doesn't betray how conflicted he's feeling right now. He breaks eye contact first when their eyes meet and stares off into space as Kaito's question bounces around his head.

Does he actually regret picking to believe in Kaito and his lie? Like it or not, he *did* use Kaito's lie as a crutch to help himself fumble through a conversation with Kirumi. He chose to use that lie to help him before remembering everything he needed to. It just frustrates him that, god he can't believe he's even thinking this, Kaito, yes, dumbass Kaito, is slowly but surely making a point.

Kaito's answer of 'because' earlier was annoyingly the perfect answer for him to use because, fuck, Kokichi realises he doesn't really have an explanation as to why he chose to believe in him. He's never going to have a proper explanation.

And that *scares* him.

Believing in people for the sake of believing in people is a brand new territory for him. He grew up in an environment where being wary is the only way to weed the strong from the weak. Kokichi wouldn't say he was born a liar but he certainly grew up as one. He grew up knowing as long as he had words to hide behind then he'd be fine.

Kaito's expression softens and Kokichi clicks his tongue loudly as he continues to blatantly ignore Kaito. "You know what, forget it. You don't have to answer. I shouldn't have even asked in the first place."

Whilst Kaito doesn't sound angry, he fails to hide his disappointment and that makes Kokichi feel even worse. It's Kaito's turn to turn his head to the side as he coughs into the crook of his elbow. Kokichi sighs, shuffling his upper body upwards so he can grab Kaito's arm to make sure he's not trying to hide if he's coughing blood into his elbow.

People like Kaito are rare, he realises. He's never met anyone before who wears their heart on their sleeve so proudly. He sighs when he realises that Kaito isn't trying to hide any blood. He just needed to cough.

Kokichi bites the inside of his mouth as he awkwardly waits for Kaito to realise that he's basically using him as a chair. Then he notices something peculiar. He raises an eyebrow as he realises that Kaito is looking down at him silently with a surprised look in his eyes. Kokichi mistakes the sudden flush on Kaito's face as Kaito doing too much at once and taps his elbow.

"Are you going to get off me or what?" Kokichi asks expectantly.

Kaito blinks and swears loudly. "Oh shit, *fuck*, my bad man. Holy shit I'm so sorry-"

"What for?"

"For pinning you down like that."

"Momota, you literally just sat on me," Kokichi says. "If I wanted you off me sooner then I would've pushed you off the bed myself. But, you know, maybe don't go around doing that to other people in the future."

"I didn't hurt you did I-"

"No, Momota, you didn't," Kokichi sighs. "I was already lying down so no, you didn't catch my wound or anything before you ask."

Kaito's flush doesn't leave his face and Kokichi stops the astronaut from turning away from him too soon as Kaito tries to lie down. He puts his hand to Kaito's forehead and huffs.

"You're really not doing all that good, are you?" Kokichi asks carefully, brushing away some

sweaty strands of hair from Kaito's face. He frowns and chews his bottom lip thoughtfully.

He notices that Kaito is struggling to look him in the eye. "...no, not really."

Kokichi hums as he finally lets Kaito lie back down and he copies him, sliding under the duvet whilst Kaito turns his back on him. "...do you know how much longer you have left?"

"...days, maybe? Without any proper professional medical help I don't think...you know...I've got long left," Kaito answers quietly.

"Oh." Kokichi swallows as he shuffles just a little closer to the astronaut, pressing his face into his back. He wasn't expecting that answer.

"Ouma?"

"I don't regret believing in you," Kokichi mumbles into Kaito's back, his voice muffled. "And that's the *only* time I'm ever going to tell you that, got it? You tell anyone about this conversation and I'll just deny it ever happening."

He feels Kaito freeze before eventually loosening up again. When Kaito doesn't respond straight away, he mentally swears at himself for saying something so stupid in the first place. He opens his mouth to apologise but doesn't even get the chance before Kaito finally responds to him.

"Never thought I'd hear you admit such a thing out loud," Kaito says with a voice that is heavy with sleep. "G'night, Ouma."

Kaito starts to snore and Kokichi simply lies next to him, feigning sleep when Ryoma and Tenko check in on them both. One of them must turn off the bedroom light because when he opens his eyes next, it's dark.

The astronaut stirs ever so slightly when Kokichi slips out of the bed and creeps into his own room to grab something. He returns, hugging a notebook to his chest and hesitantly switches on Kaito's bedside lamp, pausing to see if the astronaut wakes up. When he doesn't, Kokichi swallows before putting pen to paper.

He ends up writing seven letters and slips them under the appropriate doors.

Kokichi hides his notebook under Kaito's bed, lies back down and closes his eyes.

—

Kaito shakes him awake like an excited child.

"Ouma, Ouma wake up!" Kaito is bouncing with enthusiasm as the leader cracks open an eye with a groan. Kaito shakes his arm again. "Dude, hurry *up*!"

"What?" Kokichi huffs, his voice riddled with sleep as he props himself up with an elbow. He wrinkles his nose as he realises how bright the room is. "You better have a good reason for waking me up so early-"

"I found this posted under my door this morning!" Kaito tells him as he thrusts a familiar looking letter under his nose. Kokichi thinks it's far too early for such excitement but he relents and takes the letter from Kaito's hand and reads it quietly. "They must've decided now is the right time to end the game! I knew I was right to believe in them!"

Kokichi hums tiredly as he finishes the letter silently. “Oh?”

Kaito knocks his fists together with a bright grin. “Dude, who knew that all we had to do to escape was to break the wall down? I mean, I’m hoping this letter *is* from the person whose secret was that they knew how to start the end of the killing game but my gut is telling me we can *totally* trust this letter!”

“Nice of them to finally speak up,” Kokichi says before yawning, letting the letter flutter down into his lap. “Do you know if anyone else got a letter too?”

Kaito nods. “Yeah, as soon as I read the letter I opened my door to ask around and saw Chabashira had also opened her door pretty much at the same time and she *also* had a letter! We decided that we should all meet in the dining room to discuss what to do next so c’mon, chop chop!”

The astronaut yanks the duvet from him and holds it in his arms with a cheery smile, completely oblivious to the dry look Kokichi shoots at him. The leader pouts as he realises Kaito is not going to let him go back to sleep so he gets out of bed, rolling his shoulders as he stands up.

Kokichi clicks his tongue as he realises how creased his uniform is. Perhaps sleeping in it wasn’t the best idea. “Hey, Momo-chan? I know you’re raring to go and all but maybe I should check to see if I got a letter too? Also I wanna change out of these clothes because they smell of yucky astronaut-”

“I do *not* smell!” Kaito huffs before very unsbtly smelling his own arm.

“Whatever you say, spaceman.” Kokichi rests his hands behind his head as he heads towards Kaito’s bedroom door.

“Actually, hold on just a second,” Kaito says and Kokichi pauses.

“Hmm? What’s wrong?”

“About last night…” Kaito licks his lips and puts a fist to his hip. He suddenly smiles. “Sorry if I worried you with my answer about how long I have left. I totally have longer than a couple days left, that was just an exaggeration, you know?”

The fact that Kaito can’t even look him in the eye is a dead giveaway that he’s lying. Still, Kokichi doesn’t want to be the one to ruin the peaceful atmosphere of the room so he lets out a dramatic sigh of relief. “What a relief! I can’t have you dying any time soon, my poor little heart would break!”

Kaito’s smile wavers. “Yeah, well, it’s like I said. I’m gonna be fine so there’s nothing to worry about, especially now that we have a lead on how to get out of here now!”

Yes, it certainly is a miraculous coincidence. Kokichi pumps his fists excitedly. “It’s so exciting, isn’t it?! I mean, we basically just have to break the wall down right and then you can all leave!”

His genuine excitement must be enough to make Kaito not realise his tiny slip up. “Yep! But we still need to discuss what we should do as a group so go and get ready. The sooner we can leave this hellhole, the better.”

“Aye aye captain!”

Kokichi whistles loudly as he heads to his own room. Kaito pokes his head from his door with an amused expression as Kokichi opens his own bedroom door and wiggles his eyebrows as he shows

Kaito he also got a letter.

“It says the same thing too!” Kokichi says, fuelling Kaito’s excitement.

It takes him a while to register that his smile hasn’t dropped even as he swaps uniforms. He drops his old one onto the floor and tucks his letter into one of his back pockets. When he leaves his room he notices that Kaito must’ve gone on ahead without him.

He’s the last person to arrive at the dining room. He sees Kirumi sitting at the table with her head in her hands once again whilst Korekiyo rambles about something next to her. He spots that they both have placed their letters on the table. Miu is sulking in the corner and when she spots him walk in she clicks her tongue and throws her head to the side. However, despite the hostile welcome, he notices a crumpled letter in her hand.

Tenko is talking animatedly to Kaito as she points to her letter over and over again, eyes shining with delight. By her side is Ryoma, who gives Kokichi a nod when he spots him. Kokichi sees Ryoma’s letter poking from his pocket.

Finally there’s Tsumugi, who stares at him with a slight frown. He smiles as he notices that she’s empty handed and flaunts his own letter teasingly at her. For a moment it crosses his mind that she should’ve known he went around slipping letters under everyone’s doors last night and he wonders why she hasn’t faked her own letter. But from the look on her face...huh, maybe she didn’t keep tabs on what he was up to last night for whatever reason.

Now that he thinks about it, how *does* Tsumugi always know everything anyway? Do she and Monokuma have some sort of system going? He understands that Monokuma always knows what’s going on because he’s always watching somehow. Does that mean Tsumugi is actually in the dark as much as everyone else until Monokuma informs her of what’s been going on?

She does look slightly put off and Kokichi wonders if he’s actually managed to catch her off guard for once.

Ryoma offers to make everyone breakfast and declines Kaito’s offer of help.

“After what happened to you yesterday? Nah, it’s probably for the best if you wait at the table,” Ryoma says before leaving.

Kaito pouts but does as he’s told, sitting down on a chair before bouncing his leg rather manically. He’s probably itching to kickstart the conversation about leaving.

Kokichi raises an eyebrow when he feels someone tap his shoulder and plaster a smile when Tsumugi clears her throat. “Um, Ouma? Can I have a word with you in private for just a second?” She gestures to the outside seating area with her head.

“I don’t know, can you?” Kokichi puffs his cheeks out. “That was rhetorical. The answer is no.”

“Eh?” Tsumugi pouts. “But...”

He can feel Tenko stare daggers into his back for being so blunt with Tsumugi. He waves at the aikido master, who huffs at him. “Don’t be such a degenerate.”

“But what if she’s luring me outside to kill me?!” Kokichi’s lip wobbles. “Right as we all know how to stop the game too!”

“Why on earth would Shirogane kill you if there’s a chance for us to escape just around the

corner?" Korekiyo sighs. "Although one must wonder why Shirogane wants to speak with you in private in the first place..."

"I need to talk to him about something...personal," Tsumugi admits bashfully, scratching her cheek with a painted fingernail. "And you're right, it would be plain pointless of me to kill someone since there's a chance that we all might get to escape soon."

"Ouma," Kaito says and surprisingly sounds slightly disapproving. "If a girl wants to tell you something then you shouldn't ignore them!"

"Oh? Is Shirogane inviting me out for a secret rendezvous so she can confess her undying love for me?" Kokichi suggests. "Because if you are then it's always best to be honest in these sort of situations and I sadly wouldn't even touch you with a ten foot pole so-"

"I don't like you that way either, Ouma," Tsumugi calmly says. "There's just something I want to ask you before breakfast is ready."

"Momota is right," Korekiyo says. "You should never keep a girl waiting."

"Fine, fine..." Kokichi rolls his eyes as Tsumugi guides them to the decking outside, closing the door behind her with a quiet sigh. Kokichi's eyes flicker towards the window and he's somewhat comforted by the fact that there is a clear view of the decking they are on from the dining room. "What the hell do you want?"

"What are you up to?" Tsumugi asks him and surprisingly sounds more curious than miffed. "You were the one who put those letters under everyone's doors last night, right?"

"Hmm? Shouldn't you already know that? Why are you asking me?"

Tsumugi rubs her arm. "You do know that I don't know everything that goes on around here, right? It's even impossible for Monokuma to keep an eye on everyone all of the time. We record everything that goes on and Monokuma goes through the footage every morning and tells me if there's anything I need to know."

"Eh, now that doesn't sound all that practical," Kokichi says. "But I still don't get why you brought me out here."

"Well Monokuma never got the chance to talk to me this morning before everyone started making a big deal about the letters they got," Tsumugi tells him with a frown. "But it doesn't take a genius to figure out that you were the one who posted them."

"And?" Kokichi crosses his arms. "You're the one who decided to keep me alive when you easily could've framed me for Kiibo's death. You knew something like this could happen."

"I'll admit, I am slightly surprised," Tsumugi says. "After all, you know what your actual instruction is, right?"

"Yep."

"Huh..." Tsumugi stares off into space with a thoughtful expression before adjusting her glasses. "Okay then."

"Hah? Is that it?" Kokichi cocks his head to the side.

"I mean..." Tsumugi hums before continuing. "Maybe I should be a little more worried but I'm

finding this entire situation exciting more than anything. It feels like we're approaching the end game and..." She giggles. "I've been looking forward to that from the very start."

"Is that so?" Kokichi says as it clicks why Tsumugi brought him out here in the first place. She's trying to psych him out. "Well I'll make sure not to disappoint you then."

"Oh, I'm confident you won't," Tsumugi tells him. "After all, you're going to try your hardest to break the wall down as quickly as you can, right?"

He huffs, refusing to answer.

"Hmm, maybe that was a silly question to ask in the first place," Tsumugi mumbles. She takes a step forward and Kokichi fails to hold back a flinch, taking a step back himself. He glares at the grin that appears on her face. "Oh? Don't tell me you're actually scared of me?"

"Of course I'm not," Kokichi lies. "I just don't want to stand so close to a sadistic bitch like you."

"Oh wow, language!" Tsumugi scolds him half-heartedly. "There's no need to be rude."

"You're acting like you haven't probably been called worse before," Kokichi says.

Tsumugi shrugs. "Perhaps."

Kokichi purses his lips. "So are we done here?"

"I mean, I guess so," Tsumugi says. "But..."

"What?"

Tsumugi seems genuinely curious as she rests her hand on her cheek. "Breaking the wall down seems kind of counterproductive when it comes to avenging everyone who has died so far. Do you not think they deserve justice?"

Kokichi shrugs. "Oh? It almost sounds like you want me to demand for a class trial and tell everyone what you've done."

"Well that *is* how my killing game is supposed to go," Tsumugi says. The lack of concern in her voice irritates him. "Although I suppose I don't really have to worry about that too much."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"Hmm..." Tsumugi's gaze drifts towards the wall. "Is it cliché of me to say that's for me to know and for you to find out?"

"A cliché answer from a cliché bitch. To me it sounds like the perfect response."

Tsumugi laughs at him and heads inside, putting on a disgustingly pure smile as she holds the door open for him. "After you," she says, putting a hand on his shoulder as he steps back into the dining room.

"Go fuck yourself!" He cheerfully tells her, quiet enough that only she can hear him but loud enough so he knows she definitely heard him.

He perks up when Kaito gestures for him to sit down next to him. Kokichi slides next to the astronaut as Tsumugi sits across from him with a stupid, warm expression on her face that makes him want to pour tea on her head.

Ryoma clearly decided to go with making a simple breakfast. There's a couple of bowls of fruit and already buttered toast in the middle of the table. He also eyes up a selection of jam.

"Sorry it isn't much," Ryoma says when he notices Kokichi checking out the small selection. "But I thought it was more important to start discussing what we should do next so I didn't make anything too extravagant."

"It's fine," Kirumi reassures him, nursing a cup of tea in her hands. "Thank you, Hoshi."

Tenko is practically vibrating in her chair as she slams her letter down onto the table. "So everyone got one of these this morning, right?"

"It seems so," Korekiyo answers. "Although it seems Shirogane is lacking a letter herself."

Tsumugi flushes when everyone turns to look at her. "I, ah, plainly left my letter in my room. I left my room as soon as I read it to make sure everyone else got the same letter and ended up leaving it behind as a result."

It's a reasonable explanation but Kokichi didn't purposefully leave her out just for her to easily weasel her way out of the hot seat. He wants her to squirm. "Sounds kinda fishy to me. Maybe you're the one who wrote them all and didn't think far enough ahead to write one for yourself to avoid suspicion?"

"Why would she want to avoid suspicion in the first place?" Korekiyo asks.

Miu surprisingly assists him as she slams a fist onto the table, causing all the cutlery and plates to rattle. "Because some idiot has known for a while how to end the game but because they were too slow, Kiibo ended up dying as a result. If they hadn't held out for so long then he'd still be alive and once I get my hands on-"

"Truma, I know you're upset, especially since Kiibo's death was an accident but there's really no point in threatening people," Ryoma says. "Besides, we also need to consider the fact that these letters could just be a prank. They do seem too good to be true."

"Whilst the timing of them is peculiar..." Tenko yells enthusiastically as she punches the air. "At least we have something to work with now! After all, the wall is the reason why we haven't left in the first place. However, if someone is confident that breaking it down is going to guarantee our escape then Tenko thinks we should smash the wall into tiny pieces!"

"I don't think breaking the entire wall is necessary," Korekiyo says. "The letter did imply that to end the game all we need to do is get ourselves on the other side of the wall."

"It was oddly worded," Kirumi agrees.

"And that makes me want to believe in the letter even more!" Kaito declares. "Besides, why would Monokuma prank us this way? I bet the last thing he wants is for the wall to be broken down since it's the only thing containing us!"

"Won't that make him more desperate to stop us then?" Tsumugi points out. "It seems that he has a way to always listen in on us so I plainly think that he's probably getting rid of everything that might help us as we speak."

Kaito clicks his tongue. "Yeah, but the wall is just made from glass, right? Can't we just start chucking things at it until it breaks?"

“And risk dropping the wall on top of us?” Kirumi raises an eyebrow. “I’m fairly confident the only reason none of us have attempted to break the wall is because of the risk of it crushing us.”

“Tenko presumed the wall was simply unbreakable in the first place,” Tenko admits. “But the letter does suggest that there might be a way to take it down!”

“Even the toughest glass breaks eventually,” Korekiyo says. “Perhaps it was foolish of us all to dismiss breaking the wall down as a way to escape in the first place.”

“Yeah, well, we’re considering it as an option now so there’s no point dwelling on what ifs!” Kaito cheerfully responds.

“Should’ve considered it as an option much earlier,” Miu grumbles, leaning back on her chair with crossed arms.

“Yeah, in hindsight it *is* kinda weird how none of us decided to make a tiny hole in the wall to escape,” Kokichi agrees. “But there’s really no point crying over what ifs. Let’s smash the wall down as soon as possible!”

“Indeed, the sooner the better,” Kirumi says. Her lips go thin as she fumbles with her gloves. “I’ll...happily watch from the sidelines as everyone prepares a way to create a hole in the glass.”

“Pretty sure that the room full of weapons upstairs might have something inside that’ll help us,” Tenko says. “Although Tenko herself has no clue how to actually use anything in there.”

“Don’t worry! I’ll figure out how to work out anything that we need!” Kaito reassures her.

Ryoma shakes his head as he says, “no you won’t. After what happened yesterday you’re not doing anything strenuous today-”

“Aw c’mon man, I’m fine!” Kaito argues as he gestures up and down his body. “See! Besides, isn’t it more important to have as many people help with this as possible-”

“We just need a couple of people to check out the weapons, right?” Ryoma says. “I’ll do that with Chabashira and Shirogane. It doesn’t take a genius to figure out what’ll cause an explosion.”

“Tenko isn’t sure she’s comfortable with handling weapons,” Tenko admits, pressing two of her fingers together nervously. “Although if it’s for the sake of helping everyone escape then...”

“Oh, don’t worry. I’m sure Hoshi and I will be fine checking through the weapons by ourselves,” Tsumugi reassures her.

“Are you all braindead?” Miu suddenly asks, huffing as she rocks her chair backwards. “Why would Monokuma leave weapons lying around for us to use if he thought they could break the wall?”

“Ah...I suppose you might actually have a point,” Tsumugi mumbles quietly. “But if you’re right then...how *do* we break the wall?”

Miu rolls her eyes. “Tsk, gotta do everything around here myself, don’t I?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Ryoma asks.

“I’ll...make something to help us,” Miu mutters. “Since it’s obvious that we’re gonna need something that isn’t basic to help break the wall. I’m still...really annoyed that someone held out

on us for this long but...”

“Do you know how long it’ll take for you to make something?” Korekiyo asks curiously.

Miu scowls at him. “I’ll take as long as I want, okay? If any of you idiots manage to kill yourselves whilst I’m working then it’s not my fault. If I can find the right sh-” She clears her throat. “I mean if I can find the right stuff to work with quickly then I’ll probably have something made for tomorrow. You can’t rush perfection.”

“Why are you trying so hard to censor yourself?” Tenko asks.

“Because,” Miu huffs.

“Oh, is your instruction that you’re not allowed to swear or something?” Kaito realises.

“Go ahead and scream it to the entire world, why don’tcha?!” Miu storms out of the room, holding her wrist to her chest protectively. The doors swing shut slowly behind her.

“Looks like someone is in a bad mood,” Kokichi mumbles before taking a sip of his tea.

Kirumi sighs. “She’s been like this ever since Kiibo’s trial. Whilst it’s understandable that she’s upset, I hope she calms down soon so she doesn’t end up doing something rash.”

“Still, at least she’s willing to help us,” Kaito says before grinning. “Can’t believe we might actually be able to leave soon!”

Korekiyo plays with a strand of his hair as he says, “yes, it is nice to think that we won’t have to stay here much longer, although it saddens me that I’ll no longer get to watch the beautiful reactions of people facing death head on.”

Tenko doesn’t look impressed. “You’re weird.”

“Yes, I have been told,” Korekiyo responds, not sounding the slightest bit upset at her words.

“Still think there’s something about these letters that seem too good to be true,” Ryoma mumbles quietly. He’s loud enough to catch the attention of the room. He sighs when everyone looks at him. “Just seems oddly convenient that they were given to us now, that’s all. Dunno if Monokuma is just pranking us or if someone is going the wrong way about cheering us all up but...”

“Well it’s kinda nice to have a little hope to cling onto,” Tsumugi says as she runs a thumb over her bangle. “Monokuma gave us such a depressing motive that I felt like crying when he made me put my bangle on. Being told that we might have a way to leave certainly has improved my mood.”

“I know, right?” Kokichi finishes his tea and places his cup down onto the table. “And it’s not like Monokuma can stop us all at once either! He’d probably intervene if only one person tries to break down the wall but if all of us try together then we can just overwhelm him!”

“That’s right!” Tenko giddily says. “Tenko hasn’t felt this relieved in her life!”

“Just try not to get your hopes up too much,” Ryoma tells her. “Don’t want to be the one who brings the mood down but, well, we should prepare ourselves for the worst just in case.”

“You’re worrying too much,” Kaito says. “Just relax! I’ve got a really good feeling about this.”

“Yeah, so do I,” Tsumugi agrees and smiles as she readjusts her glasses.

Kokichi's own smile flickers at her words.

He wrings his hands behind his back after knocking on a certain door.

The door opens and Miu instantly glares at him and refuses to open the door any further. "You've got some *nerve* coming here-"

"Let's skip the dramatics, okay?" Kokichi says and pushes his way into her lab, ignoring her squawks of surprise as he looks around with his hands on his hips. He notices that every single surface in her room is covered with scraps or inventions. However, what stands out to him the most are the empty bottles of alcohol that are lined up next to one of her desks. He notices that she has an entire crate of full bottles in the corner. "Eh, where did you get all this alcohol from?"

Miu sniffs. "Shirogane's lab."

"I see, I see..." Kokichi peers around quietly. "So...have you started on making something yet?"

"Been checking what I've got to work with," Miu responds with a scowl. "And I hate to say it but I doubt I'm going to be able to make something with what I've got available. Even went to that room full of weapons and well..." Miu picks up a grenade and gives it a squeak. "Monokuma clearly is several steps ahead of us."

Kokichi clicks his tongue. "Have you not checked Kiibo's lab out-"

"Don't say his fu-" Miu clears her throat with a dangerous look in her eyes. "Don't you *dare* say his name. Everyone else might think that Kiibo's death was just an accident but I know better."

Kokichi holds his hands up in mock defeat. "I was just trying to suggest that maybe there's something in his lab you could use." He remembers Kiibo's audio and how both him and Kiibo concluded that Kiibo must've gotten some sort of upgrade during a previous game. "Have you not checked his lab out yet?"

"Monokuma made a big deal about how we're not supposed to go into dead student's labs," Miu says. "Although he didn't outright say I couldn't go into Kiibo's I guess."

"You didn't answer my question-"

"No, I *haven't* been inside," Miu tells him with an icy glare.

"Then why are you wasting time standing around like an idiot?" Kokichi sighs exasperatedly. "His lab is literally next door. It'll take you literally a couple of minutes to go through his stuff and-"

"Have you always been such an insensitive pri-" Miu swallows heavily. "An insensitive loser?"

"You literally knew him for a week at best," Kokichi says. "I don't know why you're so upset-"

"Just because you're emotionally constipated doesn't mean everyone else is," Miu hisses. "Clearly you've never had a *single* person care about you in your entire life so you don't know what it's like to care about someone other than yourself."

Well she certainly isn't holding back. "Oh wow, you're hitting below the belt today-"

"Just get out," Miu snaps and grabs him by the shoulders. "With enough luck you might end up poisoning yourself before we get the wall down and I won't have to deal with you or your lies any

longer.”

“Don’tcha think you’re being a little too cruel, Iruma?” Kokichi asks as he grabs onto the doorframe before she can fully push him from her lab. “After all, I didn’t come here to have a tea party with you. I came here to give you a little incentive to get something made as quickly as-”

“There’s absolutely *nothing* you can give or tell me that’ll make me do *anything* for you-”

“What if I told you that I know for a fact that Kiibo’s death wasn’t just an accident?”

He barely manages to hold in his yelp of surprise as Miu all but throws him against one of her desks, his back digging into the cold metal surface as she towers over him with a hammer in her hand. The murderous look in her eyes is rather terrifying but he knows he has her hook, line and sinker.

“*I knew it,*” she hisses, tightening her grip on her hammer as Kokichi tries to move into a more comfortable position. She grabs his scarf and yanks him forward. “Tell me what happened to him *right now* before I smash your teeth out one by one-”

“Oh, no, I can’t do that,” Kokichi says a little too bravely for someone who is seconds away from being smacked with a hammer. Miu growls and his scarf wrinkles under her grip. “With how you’ve just reacted, what’s stopping you from instantly going to find the person who killed him and wasting even more time?”

“Someone k-killed him?” Miu’s hands start to tremble. Whilst it’s obvious that she had her theories about someone killing Kiibo, it’s clear hearing the truth out loud has shaken her more than anticipated. She doubles down on her mission for answers and pushes him even harder against her desk. “Tell me right now-”

“As soon as you make something that’ll actually help break the wall then I’ll tell you *everything* and that’s a promise,” Kokichi says and his tone of voice leaves no room for arguing. His previous sleazy businessman-like smile quickly warps into a frown. “Do you seriously think I’m the sort of person who lets people get away with shit like this?”

Miu whimpers at his very sudden change in demeanour and her grip on her hammer loosens ever so slightly. “W-Well-”

“I wouldn’t be here right now if I wasn’t scraping the bottom of the barrel,” Kokichi hisses. “I am *one* minor inconvenience away from breaking the wall down with my own two hands and the only reason I am not outside doing that right now is because I still have a *tiny* shred of dignity left.”

The hammer in her hand shakes violently before she clicks her tongue and lets him go. “Of course someone like you resorts to blackmail to get what they want.”

“I’m not blackmailing you, Iruma. I’m securing everyone an exit,” he says. “And since you’re clearly not motivated enough to help us all I thought I’d give you a reason to get off your ass and make something for everyone.”

“If you cared even a little bit about Kiibo then you wouldn’t be doing this and you know it,” Miu retorts.

Something about her words rub him up the wrong way. A crooked smile grows on his face. “Weren’t you the one who ignored him when he tried to make up with you?”

“Y-You were there when he was at my lab?” Miu looks genuinely surprised.

“I listened to him *beg* for you to hear him out yet you didn’t even open the door for him,” Kokichi says. “And do you know what? Even though you cruelly ignored him, he still wanted to fix things between the two of you. You had given up on him but he hadn’t given up on you.”

He almost jumps when she lets the hammer slip from her hands and onto the floor. Her face turns pink as she desperately tries to blink back tears and Kokichi realises he’s probably pushed her a little too far. “Even after I was so mean to him...he still thought we were friends?”

She rubs her eyes with the palms of her hands, sniffing noisily before wrapping her arms around herself.

“Iruma, you probably spent the most time with him out of any of us here. You of all people should be able to figure out that it would’ve taken something drastic for Kiibo not to like anyone here,” Kokichi tells her. “Hell, he put up with me and I’m...*me*.”

Miu snorts tearfully. “Yeah, he did put up with a lot from the both of us, huh?”

She wistfully looks around her lab and Kokichi wonders if she’s mentally replaying memories of all the different times she spent with Kiibo in this very room. There’s something soft in her expression.

“Y’know, out of everyone here I didn’t think you’d be the only person smart enough to not jump to the conclusion that Kiibo’s death was just an accident,” Kokichi admits.

“Yeah, well...” Miu sniffs as she wipes her cheeks. “I knew I was right about Kiibo not being stupid enough to fall down the stairs in the middle of a killing game. That sort of thing just reeks of suspicion. However, there’s one thing I don’t get.”

“Hmm?”

“Monokuma agreed that Kiibo’s death was an accident,” Miu says. “Why are we all still alive?”

“Oh yeah, that is interesting isn’t it?”

Miu frowns. “You do know why Monokuma did what he did, right?”

“Yep, yep,” Kokichi responds. “But enough theorising, I’m not telling you a word more until you go into Kiibo’s lab and go through his stuff. If I don’t have something in my hands that’ll help me shatter the walls by tonight then I’m going to strangle you.”

“H-Hee...” Miu nervously backs away from him. “W-Why are you giving me such a short time frame to work with anyway? You can’t rush things like this.”

“Are you seriously asking me why I don’t want to stay here any longer than I have to?” Kokichi rolls his eyes. “You’re a special type of stupid, aren’t you?”

“I wanna leave too,” Miu argues hastily. “But that doesn’t mean-”

“Less talking, more working,” Kokichi tells her before dragging Miu from her lab himself.

The elevator to Kiibo’s lab is unsurprisingly locked so he bends down onto one knee and fiddles with the lock until it clicks open. Monokuma was pretty stupid to put a simple lock and chain across the door to prevent people from entering. The small elevator ride up into Kiibo’s lab is silent, which gives Kokichi the luxury of hearing Miu take a sharp breath in as they head inside.

Kiibo's lab is filled to the brim with sci-fi looking things that look far too confusing to understand. Kokichi prods at something that glows neon with his foot. "Huh, what a stereotypical looking lab."

"Kiibo would've hated this," Miu instantly says before rushing over to a desk full of complicated looking bits of machinery. The inventor side of her is probably squealing with glee as she picks up something that looks almost like a laser gun. She holds it to her face with a look of fascination. "Huh, looks like these are things that could've been used to upgrade Kiibo."

"Really?"

Miu nods. "Although Kiibo once told me he'd never want to purposefully hurt anyone so he probably would've refused to wear any of this."

Kokichi stands next to her and eyes whatever the hell is in her hands curiously. "Do you reckon you can work with what's in this room then?"

Miu pauses before nodding. "Yeah. I mean, it might take a while to alter this stuff since everything in here clearly is designed to be used by Kiibo only. In the state everything is in right now, everything in this room is basically useless."

"But you can make everything *not* useless, right?"

"Who do you think you're talking to?" Miu rolls her eyes. "Not saying I'm going to be able to adapt everything right away but I reckon if I work nonstop then I'll have something ready for tonight."

"And you're confident that everything in this room hasn't been tampered with, right?" Kokichi asks.

"Everything looks legit to me," she responds. "Quit being so paranoid."

"Well in that case let's move everything into your lab then." He scoops a handful of upgrades into his arms and almost stumbles under the weight of everything. Miu copies him and nearly trips over as she struggles to see over the top of everything in her arms.

He sighs with relief when they reach her lab, unceremoniously dumping everything onto Miu's desk before wiping his hands. Miu starts to rummage through everything almost hungrily before giving him an obvious stink eye. "Hey, you better not be lying about Kiibo just so you can get something out of me."

"Oh please, as if," Kokichi says. "If you must know, my bangle will literally poison me if I tell a lie so the fact I haven't dropped dead yet says a lot."

Miu raises a surprised brow before huffing. "So you promise you'll tell me everything once I do this one thing for you, right?"

"I *pinky* promise," Kokichi reassures her. "And you can't get a more secure promise than that."

He holds out his little finger and stares at her expectantly. Miu hesitates before wrapping her own finger around his own. "At least answer me this though. Kiibs...didn't suffer too much, right?"

Kokichi pauses before shaking his head. "Not that I know of."

"Right...okay then," Miu mumbles and pulls her hand away.

“Are you just going to take my word for it though?” Kokichi asks her curiously. “Just like that?”

“I think we both know where I’ll be shoving this hammer if I find out you’re just screwing around,” Miu says as she picks up her hammer from the floor.

Kokichi hums. “Oh yikes, should I take that as my cue to leave then?”

“...I’ve not just put a giant target on my back for agreeing to help you, right?” Miu asks.

“Oh don’t you worry about that,” Kokichi reassures her. “Just make sure you get something made as quickly as possible.” His expression goes blank. “Because the most important thing to me right now is taking that wall down and I’m not letting *anything* get in my way. You build me something useful and I’ll tell you *everything* you need to know.”

Miu swallows before nodding. “I’ll find you when I’m done, okay?”

“No, you’ll bring whatever you make straight to me as soon as you’re done,” Kokichi corrects her sharply. “Okay?”

“Geez, calm down. Fine, I’ll do that then. Happy?”

The corner of Kokichi’s lips quirk upwards. “Very.”

For once, he’s telling the truth.

—

“Shirogane!” Kokichi catches her arm and hugs it to his chest with a grin.

It takes him an annoyingly long time to find her. He ends up finding her outside taking a walk. She raises an eyebrow. “Can I help you, Ouma?”

“Yep!” Kokichi nods eagerly as he starts to pull her along the path. “Do you want to take a walk with me?”

“No-”

“Yes you do.” Kokichi smiles brightly as Tsumugi frowns at him. “I think it’s about time we spent some quality time together, don’t you?”

“Again, no-”

“Buzz, *wrong* answer.”

It takes a while to fully ignore the crawling sensation that runs up and down his skin due to him being so close to her. However, he plasters on a smile and ignores Tsumugi’s attempts to pull herself away as he walks her towards the school.

Kokichi Ouma - Finale?

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who left a comment on the previous chapter and to everyone who left a kudo! I've read through this a couple times but if there are still any mistakes then my bad :,)

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Despite not having played tennis for a while, Ryoma is still scarily good at it. The ball flies past Tenko at a dizzyingly fast speed and Tenko yelps as she spins around to spot where the ball went, putting a hand above her eyes as she searches.

“That’s one point to Hoshi!” Kokichi cheers from the sidelines. He’s sitting crossed legged on the floor next to Tsumugi, who is currently hugging her knees to her chest.

“That’s not how tennis works,” Ryoma sighs exasperatedly. However, he doesn’t care to expand on the topic any further.

Tenko hisses through her teeth as she adjusts her grip on her racket. “You hit the ball so hard Tenko wasn’t able to keep an eye on it! How is she supposed to win against someone like you?”

“I’m not even trying to win,” Ryoma admits quietly.

“That must mean you’re just a naturally good player then,” Tsumugi says. She tucks her hair behind her ears as she shuffles into a more comfortable position. “Even I lost sight of you as you moved to hit the ball. It’s almost as if you just disappeared!”

“That’s because I used the Shukuchi Method,” Ryoma tells her. “It allows me to move faster so it’s pretty convenient to use.”

“Eh, but why would you use that method if you’re so disinterested in tennis?” Kokichi asks. “Don’t tell me that you actually care about winning?!”

Ryoma huffs. “I don’t particularly care what the outcome of this game is. I’m only playing so Monokuma doesn’t set my bangle off.”

“You say that but even Tenko can sense the passion coming from you whilst we play!” Tenko responds as she picks up a random tennis ball from the floor. “Hoshi acts like he doesn’t like playing but the moment you actually get into the game you-”

“That’s enough.” Ryoma frowns as he gestures for her to hit the ball towards him. “I didn’t ask for your help so you could lecture me. The sooner we finish this game, the better.”

Tenko frowns but silently hits the ball across the court, her frown deepening as Ryoma hits the ball back half-heartedly. It catches in the net and comes to an abrupt stop. Tenko growls. “You didn’t even try to hit it back properly! You did the exact same thing last night too!”

“Monokuma just wants me to play one game a day, right? My instruction never mentioned anything about how well I needed to play,” Ryoma says. “I really would rather just get this game finished quickly so I don’t have to think about playing again for today-”

“No.”

Tenko grabs another ball from the floor and hits it towards him with a yell. Ryoma barely dodges the ball, sidestepping away from it just at the last second. He looks at Tenko with half lidded eyes. “No?”

“Whether you like it or not, you loved tennis once and,” Tenko launches another ball at him with a quick flick of her wrist. He only just manages to hit it back. “As much as you insist that you hate tennis now, you’ve slipped up several times! Sometimes you do these complicated moves that make it impossible for Tenko to hit the ball back or you get this intense look in your eyes that makes Tenko almost scared of playing tennis with you, in a good way though!”

“In a good way?” Tsumugi repeats curiously.

Tenko nods. “Yeah, like Tenko knows she’s stupid for even thinking she could even win against Hoshi! Even the stance he’s in right now is a rather professional one that only seasoned tennis players stand in! Tenko just thinks it’s sad that Hoshi doesn’t even want to give tennis a chance anymore.”

“Why would I want to continue playing tennis when I’m the one who tainted it?” Ryoma asks, a crack echoing around the room as he hits the ball back to Tenko. She yelps and stumbles, stretching her arm out and scarcely manages to catch the ball with her racket.

“Oh, that’s right,” Tsumugi murmurs. “You took out an entire mafia with a single racket and ball, right?”

“A custom made ball,” Ryoma uncomfortably responds, grunting as he hits the ball again. “I used my own tennis skills to kill people. What sort of person does that? I took advantage of my title of Ultimate Tennis Pro and killed people out of spite-”

“Tenko remembers hearing about you on the radio,” Tenko wheezes as she hits the ball over the net, “you only turned to murder because your entire family had been killed, right?”

“Don’t try to justify my actions.” Ryoma hits the ball particularly hard and it whizzes through the air. Tenko holds her racket to her face to protect it and by some miracle the ball bounces at an angle that allows for it to bounce back over the net. “You should never try to justify murder. *Ever*. I didn’t have to hunt everyone down involved with my family’s murder but I did. I didn’t have to kill them one by one but I did. And do you know what the worst part is?”

“What?” Tenko stands her ground as Ryoma hits the ball back over to her.

“Killing everyone responsible didn’t even make me feel better,” Ryoma answers with a humourless snort. “In fact, I probably felt even worse. Didn’t just have to deal with the fact I was all alone, I also had to deal with the fact that I was going to have to live with blood on my hands for the rest of my life. I stained my reputation and I brought disgrace to the tennis world. The best choice I ever made during that time in my life was to turn my back on the tennis world so I couldn’t make things worse.”

Tenko lets out a disappointed huff as she’s too late to catch up with the ball. It bounces past her and rolls out of sight. She pants, resting her hands on her thighs before holding a hand up. “Tenko…”

needs a minute before we continue.”

“Ah...” Ryoma clears his throat uncomfortably. “My bad.”

“Don’t...Don’t apologise,” Tenko insists as she slowly gets her breath back. “Tenko wants more matches like this! Even if it’s only one game, if you’re going to play a game of tennis then you should at least play it properly, right?”

“Yeah, Hoshi,” Kokichi teases. “You’ve already disgraced tennis enough without making a mockery out of it by playing so sloppily.”

“Hmph, I hardly call this a game of tennis,” Ryoma mutters.

Tenko glares at him. “Well Tenko does because if we don’t call this a game then Monokuma is going to kill you.”

“Fine, fine...”

He plucks up a random ball from the ground and rubs it with his thumb as he waits for Tenko to recover.

“I never knew you hated tennis this much,” Tsumugi admits, laughing helplessly when Ryoma gives her a flat stare. “Well, I knew you didn’t like it but I didn’t think being forced to play a game would make you so upset.”

“Haha, of course you didn’t,” Kokichi responds with a smile.

Ryoma directs his unimpressed stare to him. “I’ve already said the sooner I can end this game, the better.”

“That’s wrong!” Tenko suddenly yells and jabs her racket at the tennis player. “You’re the one who keeps messing up randomly! You win one round then lose the next one by playing shoddily! Don’t think Tenko hasn’t noticed what you’re up to!”

“Huh? Really?” Tsumugi blinks. “Wow, I never noticed.”

“To fully win a game properly, the winner needs a two point lead if there is a tie,” Tenko says, giving Ryoma an unreadable look. “You told Tenko the rules last night so she remembers them very well!”

Ryoma’s lips go thin as he sucks in a breath.

“So as long as Hoshi wins a round and then loses the next one straight afterwards, a game can go on for a very long time?” Kokichi asks.

Tenko nods firmly. “Tenko has been finding it weird that he’s been so good one round and then doesn’t even put in any effort the next! Tenko thought he was playing so badly because he wasn’t enthusiastic about playing but she’s figured it out now! You actually really do miss playing tennis, don’t you?”

Tsumugi makes a sympathetic sound as Kokichi averts his gaze, whistling loudly when Ryoma catches his eye. The tennis player pauses before letting his shoulders slump. “Of course I do.”

Tenko sighs. “Then why-”

“I stopped playing tennis because I didn’t want to remind myself of everything I sacrificed,”

Ryoma says. "And to also...protect all the happy memories I have of playing it. I knew if I continued to play even in prison then I'd end up tainting every memory I had of tennis even more. Thought it would be for the best to preserve what I do remember and call it a day."

"You stopped playing because you were worried you'd end up forgetting your early days of tennis?" Tsumugi asks.

Ryoma nods. "If I kept playing then my perception of those memories would've become warped, you know? I already loathed myself and if I kept playing then it would've just been the same as hurting myself. Sometimes it's just better to, you know, quit while you're ahead. What's the point playing a game over and over again hoping for different results knowing that in the end you're still going to hate it?"

Tenko grimaces. "Hoshi, Tenko had no idea that you were having such a bad time-"

"Whilst I'm not really having fun, you're right about one thing though," Ryoma says before sighing. "A small part of me is always going to miss playing tennis. Guess that's why I keep unconsciously trying to prolong each game. I just wish that..."

"Monokuma really did just give us this motive to make us all miserable, huh?" Tsumugi mumbles gently, stroking her bangle with an unfocused look in her eyes.

"Seems so," Ryoma responds before swapping his racket from one hand to the other. "Although I guess maybe I should actually be thanking Monokuma for the opportunity actually."

"Huh?" Tsumugi raises an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"Never would've played a single game of tennis in this place if it wasn't for his motive," Ryoma admits. "And whilst a small part of me is bitter about being forced to play, well...can't lie, I guess I'm having *some* sort of fun."

"Hah! So you admit you are having some sort of fun!" Tenko grins as she waves her racket around wildly. "And Tenko was almost going to apologise to you for having to play in the first place!"

"Yeah, well, Shirogane had a point when she said Monokuma only gave us this motive to make us all miserable," Ryoma says. "If openly admitting that I'm sort of having fun upsets Monokuma then I see that as an absolute win."

"Geez, you've been hanging around Momota too much," Tenko teases. "That sounds exactly like something he would say!"

"Where is Momota anyway?" Ryoma asks.

"He's in bed," Tenko says. "He argued with Tenko for a while about how he wanted to help but there's literally nothing for him to do. Iruma said she was going to make something so there's absolutely nothing for us to do aside from wait for her to finish, right?"

"Woah, you convinced Momota to stay in bed?" Kokichi asks in awe.

"Tenko just sat on his legs so he couldn't move," Tenko admits. "Not like he put up much of a fight anyway. Momota likes to act like he's fine but he really isn't. That's why Tenko is so relieved that we have some sort of lead that might help us get us out of here!"

"Still don't think we should get our hopes up," Ryoma grumbles.

“I have to agree,” Tsumugi says bashfully. “I think it’s going to take something really powerful to break the wall down and I plainly don’t think there’s anything in the school Iruma could adapt to help us.”

“Yeah, well, she’s the Ultimate Inventor,” Kokichi tells her. “If anyone here can make something then it’s her. Don’t be such a spoilsport.”

Tenko glares at him for his rude words. “Whilst Tenko agrees that she has a lot of faith in Iruma, it *is* fair that some of us might have doubts. Tenko isn’t too personally worried because the wall containing us is just made from glass. If all we have to do to escape is to get on the other side of it then Tenko will just keep punching it until it breaks!”

“Something strange about how the letter we all got this morning was worded,” Ryoma murmurs. “It told us to end our killing game experience, all we had to do was get on the other side of the wall. It didn’t mention anything about an escape plan or what we should do after breaking down the wall.”

“That’s true,” Tsumugi agrees. “I doubt Monokuma is just going to let us walk away so easily. Even if we do break down the wall then what’s stopping him from dragging us all back?”

“Are the killing game rules void if we leave or something?” Tenko wonders. “Like maybe Monokuma legally can’t touch us if we leave.”

Ryoma raises a brow. “There’s literally nothing legal about what he’s doing to us right now.”

“Tenko knows that already you degenerate,” Tenko huffs. “But, like, what if Monokuma has some sort of agreement with someone and some dodgy person is allowing Monokuma to host his killing game as long as it’s done in secret?!”

“Ooh, I love a conspiracy theory,” Kokichi says, resting his chin in a cupped hand.

Ryoma frowns. “I don’t want Chabashira to be right because that would suggest that more people outside of Monokuma know about this game and they’re not doing anything to stop it.”

“Oh yeah, that just makes us being trapped here even worse,” Tsumugi realises. “I’d be plainly upset if I knew people knew we were here and instead of helping us, were just watching us instead.”

“Ugh, Tenko doesn’t want to even imagine what sort of person enjoys watching us all suffer,” Tenko huffs.

Ryoma tugs on his hat. “There’s always an audience for situations like these unfortunately. It’s all fun and games for the people watching because they’re not the ones who have to suffer.”

“I suppose that’s what makes mystery video games so fun,” Tsumugi says. “I’ve played a couple of visual novels that also included having to figure out murders.”

“As long as people are able to differentiate the difference between fiction and reality then there’s nothing wrong with enjoying those sorts of video games,” Ryoma says. “It’s been years since I’ve even had access to a video game console so I don’t have much experience with games myself.”

“Oh! I’ll totally have to introduce you to some games one day then!” Tsumugi excitedly suggests.

“You can show him some games once we leave,” Tenko tells her. “Which will hopefully be very soon! Ooh, it might even be today if Iruma works quick enough! Tenko is so excited!”

Ryoma sighs lightly but doesn't bring up the fact he clearly thinks the letters are too good to be true again. Tsumugi, however, is all too happy to encourage Tenko's enthusiasm. "It's nice to see that you're so happy, Chabashira. It's a nice change of pace from all the doom and gloom we've all been experiencing lately."

"Tenko has the power of Neo-Aikido on her side!" Tenko explains before punching the air. "Tenko has trained for so long that she's able to keep her emotions in check with ease! Since Tenko is feeling so excited right now then it's only right Tenko shows off her enthusiasm as much as she can! Then everyone else around her will be infected with her happiness and then be happy too!"

"Is that, um, how it works?" Tsumugi asks doubtfully.

"I don't think so," Ryoma admits.

"I don't know, I'm feeling pretty good right now," Kokichi admits. "And I bet it's all thanks to Chabashira's excitement!"

Tenko seems satisfied with his answer and twirls her racquet around. "At least someone agrees with Tenko! Now, shouldn't we get this game finished as soon as possible, Hoshi?"

"I suppose," Ryoma sighs before hitting the ball across the court.

Tsumugi hides her amused smile behind her knees as she turns to face Kokichi. "Doesn't it bother you in the slightest that if you actually do break the wall then everyone but you will get to leave?"

"Silly Shirogane, why would something like that bother me?" Kokichi answers. "Shouldn't you be more concerned that your game is in danger?"

"Is it?" Tsumugi responds and Kokichi bristles. "I don't think it's in danger."

Her answer is definitely calculated and frustratingly calm. "Oh no, this game is one hundred percent going to end today."

"You could be right," Tsumugi agrees and the smile that grows on her lips could easily be misinterpreted as serene. However, the manic look in her eyes is a dead giveaway that Tsumugi is anything but composed at the moment. "And I find that *very* exciting."

Kokichi clicks his tongue and diverts his attention back to the tennis game, frowning when Tsumugi tugs on his sleeve. "What?"

"Nothing, I just wanted to look at the expression you're wearing," Tsumugi giggles. "You don't look very happy."

"That's because I'm sitting next to you."

"You're the one who invited me to watch Hoshi and Chabashira play tennis," Tsumugi points out. "So don't act like it's my fault that I'm hanging out with you right now. Let me guess, you're keeping an eye on me so I can't interrupt Iruma, right?"

"Nope, I invited you to hang out because we're best friends," Kokichi says before rolling his eyes. "What do you think, dipshit?"

Tsumugi hums. "It's cute that you're trying to learn from your mistakes. Makes me feel like Kiibo's death wasn't an entire waste since you learned something valuable from it."

She's frustratingly good at getting under his skin. He smiles tightly. "Have you considered fucking yourself recently? Because seriously, go fuck yourself."

"Oh no, did I hit a nerve?" Tsumugi asks as if she isn't aware of what she's doing. "Whoopsie."

Kokichi pulls his sleeve from her hand and rubs it dramatically. "Hey, Shirogane? Shut up."

"But I thought we were having such a nice conversation," Tsumugi responds before shuffling closer to him. "Hey, guess what?"

"No."

Tsumugi ignores him. "I'm in a position where I can't lose, you know? If you break the wall then my game will fail and that..." She smiles softly. "The idea of that is so despairing that it almost rivals watching you all struggle. Even if you do manage to break the wall soon then it won't be your victory, it'll still be mine."

"That's just your opinion," Kokichi says. "If you want to count it as your victory then whatever. Big deal. You're the only one who is going to feel your stupid despair from the wall being broken down anyway."

"Hmm, I don't know about that," Tsumugi tells him and hugs her knees even tighter to her chest. "I bet there'll be a couple of people who will be upset when they realise you lied about your bangle."

"Oh? Are you trying to deter me?"

"Not at all," Tsumugi responds sweetly. "I just wanted to remind you that whatever you do, you're never going to win. If you want to die for no reason then that's fine. Actually, it'll be more convenient for me anyway." She puts a finger to her lips. "I think once you're gone and before everyone leaves, I'll tell them all about what I did to Angie, Gonta and Kiibo. I'm sure enough people will want a retrial and see me get punished."

It takes an unfathomable amount of restraint to not glare at her. He calmly continues to watch the tennis ball be hit across the court. "Oh? So you want to die? That's interesting."

"Well that's how most stories go, right? The hero wins and the villain gets punished," Tsumugi says. "Although punishing the villain too soon is boring. I suppose if push really comes to shove and you're so hellbent on ending my game prematurely, I'll just have to rush the ending. After all, don't they all deserve justice? You're so cruel sacrificing Gonta and Angie only to instead try to end the game before letting everyone know the truth about what happened."

"Circumstances changed," Kokichi responds through gritted teeth.

"I am plainly curious why you haven't dropped me in it yet though," Tsumugi admits. "I think enough people will believe you if you tell them what I did. After all, I'm more than confident your little friend group will believe everything you say and once Iruma finds out who killed Kiibo then she'll be the one begging for a retrial. Shinguji loves observing people when they're face to face with death and Tojo has a strong sense of justice, right?"

"Maybe I just want to prolong the game as much as you do," Kokichi says, turning his head to the side. A loud crack resounds around the room as Ryoma hits the tennis ball again. "Or maybe that's just a lie."

"You're too eager to end the game to be telling the truth," Tsumugi responds.

“Hmm. Maybe so.”

He quickly recognises her calm responses as her once again trying to psych him out. A small part of him is slightly vexed at the idea of her willingly revealing to everyone about her crimes just to spite him but at the same time he can't help but feel that Tsumugi has accidentally just revealed her biggest weakness. She's just all but confirmed that she wants to end her game a certain way, that she wants everyone to know what she did to Angie, Gonta and Kiibo.

Either she's wearing the most incredible poker face in the world, one that even rivals his own, or she knows she's going to get her own way. The mere thought makes his anxiety spike. After all, it's not like he's had a very good track record of things going his way during this game.

There's something he doesn't know, although guesses that's not something new. However, despite going through everything in his head, he cannot for the life of him figure out what he's overlooking at the moment. He knows the chance of someone killing someone else is next to nothing because of the letters he posted last night. He knows that no one here is stupid enough to set their bangle off for no reason. The instructions Monokuma gave everyone were designed to make people miserable so the chances of someone having an instruction to actually worry about is very slim. Miu is safe in her lab and Tsumugi is with him. Monokuma is a slight concern that he might sabotage Miu but there's not much he can do about him.

Ugh, when did he get so paranoid? He nibbles on the skin around his thumb as he continues to watch Tenko and Ryoma play, blatantly ignoring Tsumugi's pleased expression that is very much directed at him. He has a perfect plan in motion but he still feels like something is going to go wrong.

“Quit staring at me like some freak,” Kokichi grumbles when he realises Tsumugi is still looking at him. “Otherwise I might actually think you have fallen in love with me.”

“Hmm, as if,” Tsumugi says. “I'm just...plainly excited, you know?”

Deciding to guard her all day is quickly becoming one of his worst ideas yet.

Tsumugi prods his cheek annoyingly. “What do you think is going to happen, Ouma? Hey, do you think you'll actually manage to end the game in time? Even if you do bring the wall down I doubt everyone is going to let me get away with what I did. I'm going to tell everyone, you know?” Her eyes sparkle. “Wait, I've got it! How about I wait until the exact moment your bangle goes off and then I'll tell everyone what I did?”

The fact she's so...insistent about revealing her crimes is strange. Kokichi frowns as she pokes his face again.

“Do you wanna know the reason why I'm not worried?” Tsumugi asks as she leans in closer. “Because no matter which angle you look at it, it's plainly impossible for you to beat me at my own game.”

Kokichi almost shivers at his own icy smile. “Ah, is that right?”

“Absolutely-” Tsumugi suddenly yelps as a tennis ball barely misses her and even Kokichi raises an eyebrow as he directs his attention over to Ryoma. He almost misses the unreadable expression on the tennis player's face before it's replaced with an apologetic grimace.

“Ah, my bad, Shirogane,” Ryoma says as the tennis ball rolls away from the cosplayer.

“Hoshi!” Tenko sounds mortified as she throws her hands up in the air. “How did you manage to

miss the net so badly?!”

“I flicked my wrist wrong,” Ryoma tells her flatly before clearing his throat.

“I-I see,” Tsumugi murmurs with a hesitant laugh. “I suppose maybe you’re not as used to playing as I thought.”

Tenko rolls her eyes. “Of course you mess up the one time there’s other people in the room. You could’ve taken Shirogane’s head off!”

“And that would’ve been so sad!” Kokichi snuffles.

“I think it was a genuine accident,” Tsumugi says quietly. “At least the ball didn’t actually hit me so there’s nothing to really worry about, right?”

Tenko clicks her tongue. “At least we only have one more round to play then we’ll be finished.”

Ryoma nods firmly as he grabs one more tennis ball from the ground and hits it hard. Tenko screeches as she struggles to decide whether to run and hide or hit it back. Her slow response causes the ball to fly past her and with that, their game of tennis ends. Surprisingly, he heads over to the net and holds out a hand for Tenko to shake.

Tenko sighs before taking his hand and shaking it. “Tenko really thought she could’ve won at least one round properly today.”

“Don’t sound so defeated, you did well for someone who doesn’t have much experience with tennis,” Ryoma tells her before letting go of her hand. “And, um, you know. Thanks for playing with me again. Glad I’ve got someone like you around, Chabashira.”

It’s a surprise her face doesn’t start glowing brightly because of the praise. Tenko pumps her fists happily. “Tenko is just glad Hoshi let her play with him.”

Kokichi catches Tsumugi’s smile twitching from the corner of his eye, which makes him snort. Who knew such an innocent display of happiness would cause Tsumugi so much grief? He’ll have to smile around her more often.

“It takes two people to play a game of tennis,” Ryoma says. “Or at least a fun game anyway.”

As Ryoma puts the two rackets away, to Kokichi’s surprise Korekiyo of all people pops his head through the door. Korekiyo’s eyes brighten when he spots that Kokichi is in the room and clears his throat.

“Ah, Ouma, I’ve been looking around for you for quite some time now,” Korekiyo says.

“*Moi?*” Kokichi tilts his head curiously. “Why?”

“Well whilst we wait for Iruma to finish what she’s building I thought I could get some research done,” Korekiyo tells him. “But there’s certain information I can’t acquire on my own and will need your help specifically for.”

“Eh? Really?” Tsumugi turns to the anthropologist with a curious expression. “What are you researching anyway?”

“There’s this strange phenomenon that I’ve noticed and I want to research it even further,” Korekiyo explains.

Kokichi holds up a hand. “You don’t want to do another séance, do you?”

Korekiyo shakes his head. “Unfortunately not. No, this research requires a couple of experiments of some sort. You’re not too busy to help me out, are you?”

“Hoshi and Tenko have just finished our game of tennis so there’s no point hanging with us anymore,” Tenko says. “Although Tenko is wondering what Shinguji’s research is all about.”

Korekiyo looks rather pleased as he happily explains. “Momota mentioned to me the other day how he said the hangar made him feel unsettled. Chabashira, do you remember how you told me that seeing the sickle in the weapons room made you feel ill?”

Tenko shudders. “Ugh, yeah. Tenko unfortunately remembers. Tenko will be glad if she never has to see that again.”

“And Hoshi, do you remember how you told me that being near large areas of water makes you feel uneasy?”

Ryoma sighs with a grim nod. “Yeah.”

“I’m just trying to figure out if there’s a reason for all our new fears,” Korekiyo admits. “And to do that I must figure out what makes everyone tick. It’s actually a good thing you’re here, Shirogane. I almost forgot that I also don’t have anything written down regarding you yet.”

“Ah, is that so?” Tsumugi rests a hand on her chin as she looks up at the ceiling thoughtfully. “I didn’t realise that people were reacting to such...random things. Did I hear you right when you said...Hoshi is scared of water and Chabashira finds sickles scary?”

“Wow, you sound morbidly interested!” Kokichi points out.

Tsumugi flushes. “It’s just, well, they’re rather random things to be scared of.”

“A lot of people are scared of water,” Ryoma grumbles, kicking the floor with a barely disguised pout.

“And Tenko doesn’t think there’s anything wrong with being wary of sickles,” Tenko says before rubbing her arms. “Have you seen one in person? They’re so weird! Of course Tenko is going to be freaked out by their strange shape!”

“Hey, did you just say Momota is scared of the hangar?” Kokichi asks. “Huh, I thought it was only built recently. How can he be scared of something that hasn’t been around for that long?”

“That’s what I’m trying to figure out,” Korekiyo tells him. “I don’t think there’s much point sitting around and twiddling our thumbs waiting for Iruma to make us something. I’ve asked her several times when she’s going to be finished and she keeps telling me that you can’t rush perfection.” He sighs. “As eager as I am to leave, I fully intend to take full advantage of the fact we’re going to be stuck here for quite some hours still and do some more research.”

Kokichi rests his hands behind his head. “Oh, so you want to figure out what makes Shirogane and I tick, huh? Don’t you think you’re being a little sadistic? You might push me to have a breakdown if you’re not careful!”

“You mustn’t fear fear itself,” Korekiyo tells him as he spreads his arms out wide. “After all, there’s nothing more beautiful than the human reaction to having to face fear head on. Have I told you all how beautiful humanity can be?”

“Several times,” Ryoma answers dryly.

“Every day during every meal,” Tenko adds with a flat stare, pressing two of her fingers together.

“A couple of times, yes,” Tsumugi politely says.

“I see,” Korekiyo says. “Well, I still haven’t received an answer from either of you. Would you like to help me with my research or not? Whilst neither of you are obliged to help, well, I’ve made it pretty obvious that there’s nothing else better to do around here.”

“Geez, pushy much?” Kokichi rolls his eyes. “Although you are right, I guess there really is nothing better to do. Buuut I’ll only join you if Shirogane also agrees to help you out too. You have literally nothing else better to do, *riiight?*”

“Um, well, I suppose not,” Tsumugi murmurs. “But-”

“Then it’s settled! Shirogane and I will totally help you out for a while, Shinguji!”

“Really?” Korekiyo’s eyes sparkle with childlike excitement. Wow, he really must like collecting research. “That’s excellent news. Very well, both of you come with me. This experiment might take a while so I hope you don’t mind.”

“Oh believe me, Shinguji. The longer you take, the better,” Kokichi says.

“But-” Tsumugi doesn’t get the chance to speak before Kokichi is pulling her onto her feet.

“There’s no time for idle chit chat,” Korekiyo tells her. “I’d like to get as much research done as possible before we leave.” He turns to Tenko and Ryoma. “My apologies if I’m stealing these two from you both.”

“They were only watching us play anyway,” Tenko says before crossing her arms. “But no doing anything stupid like running around the school. Ouma is still supposed to be resting at the moment.”

“Geez, you sound like an overbearing older sister,” Kokichi teases.

Tenko bristles. “Tenko is only reminding you to take it easy because she cares!”

“Okay...*Chabasister.*”

“C-*Chabasister?!?*” Tenko turns red and it’s a struggle to figure out if she’s embarrassed, angry or pleased. “No one has ever given me a nickname like that before...ooh, Tenko can’t tell if she loves it or hates it.”

“He could be calling you much worse things right now,” Ryoma sighs.

Even with a mask obscuring half of his face, it’s rather easy to tell that Korekiyo is smiling. “As pleasant as this conversation is, we really must get going now. I think I’d be rather disappointed if Iruma finishes her invention before I get the chance to finish my research.”

“Okay, okay, I got the hint,” Kokichi sighs. “Bye bye, Chabasister and uh...” A sly smile grows on his face. “Ryomama.”

“Christ...” Ryoma pinches the bridge of his nose but Kokichi can tell he’s fighting back a smile. “Get out before I throw you out, kid.”

Kokichi grins and waves at them both, once again resting his hands comfortably behind his head as the door to Ryoma's lab slides closed.

"And how do you feel about the salt?"

Kokichi rubs his forehead with a grimace as Korekiyo all but shoves a bowl of white salt into his face for the third time in a row. "Like I said last time, why would I be scared of salt? Are you trying to hint to me that I need to cut back on it or something? Are you calling me fat, Shinguji?"

Korekiyo rolls his eyes as he puts the bowl down and starts to scribble into his small little notebook that he always carries around with him. "If you have nothing important to say then I suggest you keep quiet."

"All you've been doing is throwing salt on me for the last five minutes," Kokichi responds with a pout, brushing some salt from his arms. "Are you trying to exorcise me or something? Because I promise that whilst I act like one, I'm totally not a demon."

"Hmm, yes, if you say so," Korekiyo murmurs dismissively as he continues to write away. He must have loopy handwriting since he continuously flicks his wrist whilst writing.

Tsumugi idly plays with the bowl of salt as she sits across from the two boys with a bored expression. "Why have you been throwing salt at us anyway?"

"To see what your reactions would be," Korekiyo answers.

"Have you met a single person in your life who has reacted positively to someone launching salt at them?" Kokichi asks. "Like seriously, genuine question?"

"Please stop whining, you're the one who agreed to help me."

"Because I thought this would be totally fun and interesting and all you've done is..." Kokichi rocks back on his chair, "took us to look at the swimming, forced us to prod some thorns outside, chased us around with a sickle and locked us in the art room."

"I did not chase you around with a sickle," Korekiyo says. "I showed you one."

"Details, details," Kokichi murmurs before flopping his head onto the table.

Korekiyo sighs before picking up a pinch of salt and flicking it at Tsumugi before she can argue. She huffs as it runs down her blazer and she starts to wipe the salt away with her hands. "Was that really necessary?"

"Yeah, if you keep throwing salt at her then she's going to start melting or something!" Kokichi says.

Korekiyo lifts his head from his notebook for a second to shoot Kokichi a very dry look before focussing on his writing again. "No she won't, don't be silly."

"Hey Shinguji, can I ask you something?" Tsumugi asks as brushes the final couple of grains of salt from her blazer. "How come you've been showing us such strange things and taking us to random places? They're rather, um specific, aren't they?"

"That's because everything I have shown you so far or have taken you are things or places other

people here have said caused them great discomfort,” Korekiyo answers. “I’m trying to figure out if people are only affected by certain random objects and places individually or if it’s a shared trauma. So far it’s looking more likely that the fear everyone is feeling isn’t shared for certain objects.”

“So what’s your theory so far then?” Kokichi asks, finding Korekiyo’s ramblings rather surprisingly interesting.

Korekiyo closes his notebook. “Well, a common thing I’ve been told is everyone has associated their random new fears with death. My random new fear is salt. I’ve never been scared of salt before waking up here so I’m thinking Monokuma might have done something to make us scared of certain things for an unknown reason. Admittedly it’s a very weak theory, which is why I want to do as much research as possible.”

“People have been associating things with death, huh?” Tsumugi’s mouth goes round as she flops her head back to look at the ceiling. “That’s...rather intriguing, isn’t it?”

“It is indeed,” Korekiyo agrees. “It does make me curious why such random objects are causing such strong reactions from people. There must be a reasonable explanation for all of this.”

“Maybe...” Tsumugi licks her lips. “People have been killed by these objects before in a past life?”

“Oh?” Korekiyo rubs his chin with a glazed look in his eyes. “That certainly is a valid theory if you believe in reincarnation. I never thought of that since I’m not a particularly religious person.”

Tsumugi hums a little too excitedly. “I wouldn’t say I’m a religious person either but...I suppose what I’m saying is just a theory after all.”

“Even so...” Korekiyo pauses before standing up. “Well, I suppose there’s no point dwelling on theories with no evidence for too long. Please excuse me whilst I grab something else to show you both.”

Kokichi pulls a face when Tsumugi starts to giggle after Korekiyo leaves. “What’s your problem?”

“I bet he’s going to come back with a bug or a roll of toilet paper,” Tsumugi says as she turns to face him. “And if I’m right then...” There’s a manic look in her eyes. It almost looks like they’re twirling.

“Hah?” Kokichi frowns and said frown deepens significantly as Korekiyo reveals a roll of toilet paper from behind his back.

Korekiyo looks at them both expectantly before clicking his tongue and throwing the toilet paper onto the table. “Once again, neither subject has a particularly strong reaction to another subject’s greatest fear,” he mumbles as he writes down what he’s saying. “Now, I was going to bring down a bug to show you both too but Gonta never specified which one scared him the most so perhaps it’s for the best if I just bring you to his lab-”

“Absolutely not,” Kokichi says firmly. “I *hate* bugs.”

Korekiyo pauses. “Oh?”

“Don’t look so excited, I’ve always hated them even before I woke up here,” Kokichi admits with a huff, refusing to look the anthropologist in the eye.

“Are you saying your fear of bugs isn’t important to my research then?” Korekiyo asks.

Kokichi nods. “Did you not take into consideration that some people might already be scared of the same things that people have recently become scared of?”

“I...did not,” Korekiyo admits before tugging on his mask. “Very well then, if you want to give Gonta’s lab a miss then there’s only one more place for me to take you both.”

“Is that the hangar?” Tsumugi asks a little too quickly, almost springing from her chair with an excited spring in her step.

Korekiyo blinks. “Yes, yes it is.”

Tsumugi is already out the door before Korekiyo even gets the chance to put his notebook into his pocket. The anthropologist simply raises an eyebrow at Tsumugi’s random spur of enthusiasm and patiently waits for Kokichi to stand up.

“Shirogane is rather peculiar, isn’t she?” Korekiyo says and if the situation was any different, Kokichi would’ve laughed.

“Hmm, I suppose so,” he instead responds.

“Although her earlier theory has stuck with me for some reason,” Korekiyo admits before fiddling with a strand of his hair. “It’s rather unfortunate that I don’t really believe in reincarnation. I do believe spirits can be called upon and that we can communicate with the deceased but I wholeheartedly don’t really have any idea what happens once someone dies.”

“Death is death,” Kokichi says. “You die and then that’s it. Game over.”

Unless you’re in a simulation, of course.

“Oh? Are you not afraid of dying?” Korekiyo asks with a curious tilt of his head.

Kokichi pauses before shrugging. “I think everyone’s a little scared of dying, right? Because we don’t know what’s waiting for us once we do die. I do think if we somehow find a way to know what’s waiting for us after death then that makes dying a little easier. I think I’m more concerned about how I’m going to die rather than dying itself.”

Korekiyo starts to tremble and for a second, Kokichi is convinced the anthropologist is about to burst out crying before he spreads his arms out wide as he walks, almost smacking him in the face. “What a beautiful answer! Whilst most people are concerned about death itself, rarely ever do people consider the agony that comes with dying!”

“Uh...” Kokichi steps away from him as they approach the hangar. “Yeah, cool, whatever.”

Tsumugi, who arrived much earlier due to also setting off before them both, raises a brow at Korekiyo’s stance before clearing her throat. “So are we going inside or is just looking at the hangar enough?”

“Well it was Momota who said he was scared of the hangar and he did say he was exploring it when he suddenly felt bad so...” Korekiyo chuckles as he allows his arms to relax. “Let’s go inside.”

Kokichi follows Tsumugi inside as Korekiyo walks beside him. The anthropologist pulls out his worn notebook once more as he looks around the hangar calmly. It seems he’s waiting for a reaction. Kokichi admittedly doesn’t feel anything as they walk through the halls and at one point starts to whistle when the silence gets too awkward.

“Oh look, there’s a room at the end,” Tsumugi points out. “Shall we take a look inside?”

Korekiyo’s skin looks rather strange under the blue lighting of the hallway. He nods. “But of course. If we’re going to explore then we might explore thoroughly.”

Tsumugi pumps a fist as her way of agreeing. She skips to the room, walking up a small yellow ramp into the room she just pointed out. Kokichi pulls a face at her disgusting display of enthusiasm and heads into the room after her, crossing his arms as he looks around.

There’s five strange looking machines standing in a row on one side of a room and there’s what seems to be a...car wash at the back? Huh, that's a rather strange thing to be at the back of the room. However, due to the size of the wash, he guesses that the only things that are ever going to be washed in it are the machines.

The hydraulic press on the other side of the room catches his attention briefly. He looks at it with the same amount of attention he would give his fingernails before moving on to the control panel near the press. He guesses the controls are not on the press itself so there can’t be any unfortunate accidents. He hums as he eyes the yellow railings.

“So I’m assuming neither of you feel any fear whilst being in this room?” Korekiyo asks as he places his pen onto his notebook.

“I don’t,” Tsumugi answers before adjusting her glasses. “Hmm, I wonder why there’s a toilet in here...”

Korekiyo ignores her and turns to Kokichi. “Ouma?”

“I wouldn’t say this room scares me,” Kokichi tells him before nibbling on the skin around his thumb. “Although...”

“Oh?” Korekiyo’s eyes shine with anticipation.

“I suppose if this room makes me feel anything, I would say I feel relieved more than anything,” Kokichi reveals.

Even Tsumugi is caught off guard by his answer. Korekiyo pauses before nodding his head slowly. “I see, I see. How peculiar. You’re the only person so far who has given an answer like that.”

“You feel relieved?” Tsumugi echoes inquisitively.

Kokichi puts a hand on his hip. His answer to Korekiyo kind of just tumbled out automatically. It takes him a couple of moments to process his words with a frown. “I mean, I *guess*?”

“How very interesting,” Korekiyo murmurs before scribbling something so intensely that it’s a miracle that Korekiyo doesn’t start a fire with his writing alone. “Whilst your answer is rather anomalous, it certainly is fascinating.”

“Are you even sure that Ouma’s feeling of relief is the same to everyone feeling fear though?” Tsumugi asks. “It does seem rather random.”

“I don’t think it’s a coincidence that both Ouma and Momota have had such strong feelings when being in this room,” Korekiyo says. “After all, you admitted it yourself that this room doesn’t make you feel anything and the same applies to me. For Ouma to feel relief in this room must mean there must be a reason why.”

“...huh,” Tsumugi mumbles. “I guess you’re right then.”

“Is that everything then?” Kokichi asks.

Korekiyo hums. “Well I would find it useful to figure out what makes you both tick but in order to do that there would be a lot of trial and error involved. Although because of the answer you just gave me, I wonder if there’s any point in continuing my research with you.”

“Eh, so you want to continue researching with just me?” Tsumugi asks with a look of surprise on her face.

“If that’s okay,” Korekiyo says.

“Well...” Tsumugi pauses before nodding. “I suppose I have nothing else better to do.”

Kokichi pulls a face at her the entire time it takes to leave the hangar. He crosses his arms as Korekiyo stops outside of Miu’s lab.

“I suppose it won’t hurt to ask if she has an answer yet to how long she’s going to be,” Korekiyo says.

“But haven’t you asked her a bunch of times already? She’s going to start to get really annoyed with you,” Tsumugi points out.

“Then she should just give me a straight answer,” Korekiyo counters as walks on ahead and knocks on Miu’s lab door.

Even from a distance Kokichi can tell that Miu looks rather annoyed that she’s being interrupted yet again. He doubts she gives Korekiyo the news he wants as she tells him something before slamming the door in his face.

“Well?” Tsumugi prompts.

Korekiyo sighs. “Once again she told me she has no clue when she’s going to be finished and even if she did, she wouldn’t waste her time telling me anyway. She’s rather odd, isn’t she?”

“Why do you want to know how long she’s going to take anyway?” Tsumugi asks. “Oh, is it that you really want to leave?”

“I simply want to know how much time left I have to do research,” Korekiyo tells her. “After all, once we all leave here then it’ll be impossible for me to continue since we’ll all be in a different environment.”

Kokichi whistles lowly. “Wow, you sure are dedicated to finishing your research, huh?”

“Well I am an anthropologist, after all,” Korekiyo says before putting a hand above his eyes. “Oh, is that Hoshi by the steps?”

Kokichi turns to look where Korekiyo is looking and also spots Ryoma heading down the stairs with his hands in his pockets. He notices that there’s a half eaten candy cigarette in the tennis player’s mouth. When the tennis player notices the small group of three, he quickly heads towards them.

“Yo.” Ryoma crunches down on his sweet again before continuing. “Kinda hoping that you’ve done as much research as you need to since I need to borrow Ouma for a minute.”

“As it happens I have finished my research with him,” Korekiyo says. “It’s only Shirogane I still need.”

“Is that so?” Ryoma hums before gesturing for Kokichi to follow him with a shrug of his shoulder. “C’mon, kid. I need to speak with you in private for just a second.”

“Are you not even going to wait for me?” Kokichi asks as Ryoma heads back up the stairs. He fiddles with his scarf before chewing on his lip. Can he risk leaving Tsumugi alone for a little while? She did tell Korekiyo that she would continue to help him but even so...

“Um, I don’t think you should keep Hoshi waiting,” Tsumugi says. “Or is it that you’re having so much fun that you don’t want to leave?”

“Well-”

“As much as it thrills me to think that you’re enjoying yourself, it’s rude to keep someone waiting,” Korekiyo tells him before turning to Tsumugi. “Now, I was thinking of looking around the top floor of the school first since that only opened up recently...”

The anthropologist walks Tsumugi towards the school and Kokichi clenches and unclenches his fists before going after Ryoma, who thankfully is waiting for him near the top of the stairs by the vines of wisteria. When Ryoma notices him, he walks him over to the benches by the dormitory and sits down heavily.

“So you wanted to talk to me in private hmm? Kinda ominous,” Kokichi says.

“I just wanted to see how you were,” Ryoma responds. “Check in on you or however you want to word it.”

“Oh? Have you been worrying about me?” Kokichi asks as he puts a finger to his lips. “Have you always been such a worrywart or have you been spending too much time with Chabashira?”

Ryoma sighs. “Just didn’t know if walking around all afternoon was going to tire you out. You look fine so I suppose maybe I have been worrying for no reason.”

“So...” Kokichi raises an expectant eyebrow. “What’s with all the dramatics? You know when you ask to speak with someone in private it kinda implies that you want to talk to them about something serious.”

“Yeah, I suppose you’re right,” Ryoma agrees before pulling out his trademark box of candy cigarettes. “Do you want one?”

“Nope! I want you to tell me what you want.”

“Hmph.” Ryoma pulls out a sweet and chews on it quietly. As he swallows, he uncomfortably fiddles with the sleeves of his leather jacket. “Seriously though, how have you been? You looked rather uncomfortable in my lab earlier.”

“Uncomfortable?” Kokichi pauses thoughtfully before shaking his head. “Nope, I don’t remember feeling uncomfortable in your lab. Watching you play tennis was a little boring but, well, it wasn’t like I had anything else better to do.”

“I thought you were the one who invited Shirogane to watch Chabashira and I play together?” Ryoma raises an eyebrow. “Kind of strange for you to pick something you’d find boring to do with her.”

“Well I wanted to sit down and rest a little first, duh,” Kokichi says. “Then Shinguji ended up kidnapping us both before I got the chance to do what I really wanted to do with Shirogane.”

“Which was?”

“None of your business,” Kokichi answers. “Maybe I was planning to take her on a secret date or something since our time here is going to be over soon, right?”

“You don’t half toe the line between lying and joking,” Ryoma sighs, tugging on his hat.

“Although then again if it turns out your instruction isn’t that you’re not allowed to lie then I suppose that’s something you wouldn’t have to worry about.”

“Oh?” Kokichi taps his chin playfully before narrowing his eyes. “What on earth are you on about, Hoshi? I’d be *dead* if I lied about my instruction to you all, you do realise that, right?”

Ryoma hums. “I suppose.”

“Hey, maybe you should tell me why you wanted to talk to me so we can both get this conversation over and done with as soon as possible?” Kokichi suggests, pressing his elbow into his leg to stop it from bouncing impatiently. “After all, there’s a couple of things I still want to do here before we leave.”

“Is that so?” Ryoma finishes his sweet and moves onto gnawing his bottom lip instead. “You know that before I woke up here I was in prison, right? Had spent several years at this one prison in particular. High security and everything. Single cells, officers down every hallway...particularly tight handcuffs.”

“Did you bring me out here to tell me your sob story or something?” Kokichi asks before smiling with the most insincere smile he can muster. “Because I’m afraid our friendship level isn’t really high enough for that yet so-”

Ryoma all but bulldozes over his attempt to keep him quiet. “As long as you didn’t fight against the handcuffs then they didn’t really leave much of a mark behind. I must admit, I was young and foolish when I first got put in jail and stupidly thought trying to take my handcuffs off every time they were put on was an excellent idea. Ended up causing myself a couple of permanent scars that never healed properly.”

“...okay, and?” Kokichi fails to stop a particularly frantic bounce of his leg. “Seriously, am I missing something? Are you okay, Hoshi? Because if you want to talk about emotions and shit then I’m literally the worst choice of person to talk to. Maybe Chabashira is around somewhere-”

Ryoma looks at him with an unreadable expression before sighing. “Hey, refresh my memory for just a second, okay? I helped look after you when you were out cold and couldn’t help but notice the mark on your wrist. Momota said you caught it when you fell in his room, right?”

Kokichi swallows before tilting his head to the side. There’s something odd about the direction this conversation is taking. “Hmm? Why do you want to know? If Momota told you I fell in his room then that’s what happened, right?”

“Are you sure about that?” Ryoma challenges.

“Yep, one hundred percent!” Kokichi answers with a smile. “Since I don’t remember much from what happened, Momota filled me in on everything! And after he did, everything clicked! I *totally* remember falling in his room and hurting myself on the way down like a klutz. Ahaha, silly me!”

“Right, right...” Ryoma murmurs. Then in a blink of an eye the tennis player grabs his wrist with the bangle on and pulls it close to his face, as if inspecting it. “Oh, don’t mind me. I’m just trying to figure out why this hasn’t gone off yet.”

“Eh?” Kokichi pouts as he tries to pull his arm back. “That’s kind of a morbid thing to say! Do you want me to die, Hoshi? You’re very mean of you if that’s the case.”

“Cut the bullshit.” Ryoma drops his wrist and rolls up one of his sleeves, revealing scarred skin that has turned pink over the years. However, there are distinct marks on his skin, marks that Kokichi quickly realises look scarily similar.

He clicks his tongue. “What are you trying to prove, hmm? What’s your game, Hoshi?”

“I know you’ve been lying about your instruction,” Ryoma says and once again doesn’t even give him a chance to fight back before rolling up his sleeve and pressing their wrists side by side. Even Kokichi knows there’s no arguing his way out of this one as he looks at both of their marks which are far too alike to even suggest that they were caused by different things. “In fact, I know you’ve been lying about a lot of things. Let’s start with the first thing you’ve lied about, shall we?”

“How about *no*-”

“Your secret from over a week ago wasn’t the one you claimed it was, was it?” Ryoma presses. “I have a pretty good idea which secret was actually yours. Your secret was that you know how to start the end of the game, right?”

Kokichi hopes Ryoma can feel how bitter he is. “Nope, I have no clue what you’re on about-”

“See, there’s a reason why I brought that up,” Ryoma admits. There’s an undeniable hint of frustration in his voice, which sounds unusually out of character for Ryoma, who is typically more laid back about things. “But we’ll get to that later. Your second lie is that you claim you went straight to Momota’s room after spending the night in your room. However, that’s wrong, isn’t it?”

“Prove it.”

“I just did,” Ryoma says and points to his wrist. Kokichi huffs and quickly rolls his sleeve down. “That wasn’t there whilst we were training together yet you definitely had a mark on your wrist by the time morning came around, meaning you were hurt sometime during the night.” He tugs on his hat, creating a shadow over his eyes. “The same night Kiibo died. Something tells me that’s not a coincidence.”

“Oh? When did you turn into the Ultimate Conspiracy Theorist?” Kokichi taunts as he angles his back so that he’s facing further away from the tennis player.

“I’m not joking around, Ouma,” Ryoma responds flatly. “I can tell with how evasive you’re being that you clearly don’t want to talk about it but there’s just some things that can’t be ignored right now. I doubt Kiibo was the one who handcuffed you and I don’t think it would’ve been fair of Monokuma to cuff you either. Someone else was involved, right?”

Kokichi narrows his eyes. “What are you getting at, Hoshi?”

“I think there’s a chance someone here is working with Monokuma,” Ryoma says. “And I think you know who that person is.”

“...okay? And?”

Ryoma hesitates. "You're...not going to tell me I'm wrong?"

"I'm telling you does it even matter if one of us here is working with Monokuma?" Kokichi rephrases as he crosses his arms. "This wall is being brought down today and there's nothing they can do to stop us if it turns out Monokuma really does have a partner in crime."

"Monokuma can't do anything to us but the rules don't mention anything about his potential partner," Ryoma says. "Which is why I need you to tell me if you truly know if someone here is working with him."

Kokichi drums his fingers against his arms with a frown. "I just said that the walls are being brought down today so there's literally no point in worrying about-"

"Ouma," Ryoma says firmly. "I need to know so we can sort them out because there's no way in hell I'm letting that wall be broken down today."

"*What?*" Kokichi snaps his head over in Ryoma's direction. His arms uncurl from their previous crossed position. "What the hell did you just say?"

Ryoma matches his glare that Kokichi shoots him and reaches into his pocket and pulls out a torn up letter that's been hastily put back together with tape. "It's one hell of a coincidence that we received letters this morning telling everyone how to escape. Awfully kind of the person whose secret was that they knew how to start the end of the killing game to wait for you to wake up. Oh wait." Ryoma's hand trembles. "I've just established that person was you."

Kokichi tries to snatch the torn up letter from Ryoma's hand and only just misses. "What is your *problem*-"

"During the start of the game, you were one of the few people who had their doubts that escaping would be so easy," Ryoma continues. "Yet this morning you were ecstatic about the letters everyone got, hell, you didn't even mention *once* that you thought the letters were too good to be true, which I must say is extremely out of character for you."

"Well since you've made it very clear that I was the one who wrote them in the first place, why would I have any reason to doubt them?" Kokichi counters.

Ryoma's expression darkens. "Truthfully, I don't give a damn about how you found out how to end the game. Something tells me Kiibo's accident involved you and him trying to take the wall down by yourselves and got caught. It would explain why everyone suddenly got letters telling us how to leave so soon after you woke up."

"Are you trying to guilt trip me?"

"Ouma, there's a reason why I established that I know you're lying about your instruction," Ryoma says and shakes the torn up letter. "Something wasn't sitting right with me and I must admit I ended up looking around your room for your instruction just in case you were simply mistaken-"

"You went into my room without my permission?!"

"For someone who acts like they have nothing to hide, it's rather strange that the letter with your instruction on ended up torn up into little pieces in your bin," Ryoma tells him. "So imagine how surprised I was when I put the letter back together and read what was on it."

Kokichi stands up abruptly as grabs the letter from Ryoma furiously. "You had *no* right to-"

“Do you seriously think I’m going to let everyone tear the wall down when your instruction is that you’re not allowed to let the wall break?” Ryoma snaps as he also pulls himself up from the bench. “You knew what your instruction was yet you still wrote letters to everyone telling them that the only way to leave is to break down the wall. Even if that is the case, there’s no way in hell I’m-”

“That wall is coming down today whether you like it or not,” Kokichi hisses, jabbing a finger into Ryoma’s chest sharply. “So *keep your mouth shut* or-”

“If everyone knew about your actual instruction then they’d happily hold off until we can figure out how to get the bangles off safely,” Ryoma argues. “Ouma, you seriously don’t expect me to stand back and let you-”

“I can’t hear you!” Kokichi covers his ears with his hands as he storms off towards the school, making sure that Ryoma follows him. Thankfully, the tennis player does and is practically catching his heels with how close he’s walking behind him.

“Ouma, for goodness sake, take your hands from your ears,” Ryoma huffs as he tries to tug on Kokichi’s arm. “Kid, I’m being serious. Why on earth are you so desperate to get the wall down today? I’m sure we can all hold out for a couple more days-”

“Lalalalala, I’m not listening!” Kokichi walks up several flights of stairs before walking towards a particular room. He kicks open the door to Ryoma’s lab, continuing to mockingly sing as he heads towards the metal door at the back of Ryoma’s lab.

Ryoma sighs as he once again tries to get Kokichi’s attention. “Ouma, you’re being unreasonable-”

“Nope! Still can’t hear anything!” Kokichi says as he heads into the prison-esque bathroom belonging to Ryoma. He removes his hands from his ears before giving Ryoma a surprised look. “Oh, did you follow me up here?”

“Ouma,” Ryoma snaps grimly. “You are seriously testing my patience.”

“Whoopsie, my bad!” Kokichi holds his hands up. “Hey, what a coincidence seeing you here.”

Ryoma pinches the bridge of his nose. “For the love of...”

“Hey, could you stay still for a second whilst I...” Kokichi takes a tentative step backwards before grabbing a pair of handcuffs from the wall. “*Yoink!*”

Before the tennis player can even react, Kokichi snaps one cuff around Ryoma’s wrist and another around one of the prison bars that are opposite the bathroom sink. Ryoma blinks owlishly before he lunges forward to grab Kokichi’s scarf, only missing by a split second as Kokichi quickly stumbles backwards.

“Hey,” Ryoma growls as Kokichi grabs the key that pair with the handcuffs and thrusts his hand out of the square window that overlooks the pool. “Ouma, don’t you *dare*-”

“Whoops.” Kokichi opens his fist and allows the keys to drop into the pool. They make a tiny splash. “Oh no, silly me.”

Ryoma stares at him in disbelief before running a hand down his face. “Ouma, what are you doing? Seriously, what are you doing?”

“I,” Kokichi says as he firmly closes the window with a snap, “am making sure that absolutely *no one* has the chance to get in my way. The wall is coming down tonight and I am not letting anyone

sabotage that. *Anyone.*”

Ryoma glares fiercely at him. “If that wall even gets a scratch on it then you’ll die-”

“So?” Kokichi suddenly finds his fingernails very interesting to look at. “I mean, I won’t be dead for long anyway. I’ll just wake back up after some time-”

“Ouma, kid, you do know how death works, right?” Ryoma is looking at him as if he’s grown a second head. “You don’t just wake up after dying. You don’t just wait to feel better. Once you’re gone, *that’s it*. There are no second chances.”

“Aw, you actually sound concerned about me-”

“I’m *very* concerned about you right now,” Ryoma responds. “Look, how about you and me sit down somewhere and have a talk-”

“I’m not uncuffing you,” Kokichi says. “Someone will find you sooner or later. You’ll be fine here for a little while, it’s not like anyone has any motive to kill you. Just, stop trying to get in my way. I’m not letting anything stop me from ending this game. Anything. So if you’ll excuse me-”

“You’re my friend, Ouma.” Ryoma frowns at him. “Call me childish for saying so but it’s true. You can’t expect me to just sit back and let you do something so-”

“I’m not going to die. Not really.” Kokichi clasps his hands behind his back. “But I’m far too busy to give you a proper explanation since I have places to be, people to bother. You know, the usual.”

“Ouma, don’t you dare leave-”

“I’ll see you around, Hoshi,” Kokichi says and closes the heavy metal door, pretending he doesn’t hear Ryoma muffled calls of distress. He hesitates for a moment, his hand gripping the door handle tightly. Then, he sighs and walks away.

—

“Have you seen Hoshi around?” Tenko finishes her cup of juice and wipes her mouth with the back of her hand.

Kokichi shrugs. “I’ve hardly seen him today besides when I watched him play tennis with you earlier.”

Tenko pouts. “Aw. Tenko was hoping she could maybe squeeze an extra game of tennis with him today but maybe he’s just too busy. Oh well, Tenko still has plans to hang out with Tojo so she supposes things could be worse right now.”

“Oh? Have you planned a little date with Tojo?” Kokichi teases.

Kirumi sighs from across the dining room table. It’s only the three of them inside. Korekiyo and Tsumugi are still traipsing around the school whilst Kaito is in bed. Miu is still in her lab and Ryoma is currently occupied.

“N-No...” Tenko mumbles as her ears turn red.

“I’ve been feeling down about not being able to do much,” Kirumi admits. “So I wanted a small distraction to keep me occupied. Whilst I can’t help anyone and Chabashira can’t help me out much, I don’t see why the two of us taking a small walk together is going to cause any problems

with our bangles.”

“So it *is* a date?”

“We’re going on a walk,” Tenko huffs.

“Well you should’ve just said that from the start!” Kokichi tells her, hiding his grin when Tenko pouts at him.

“We’re hoping Iruma might be done before the night time announcement,” Kirumi says. “If not then I’m sure we’re all in for a long night. I don’t think I’ll be able to sleep knowing that our chance to escape is coming up soon.”

“Kinda strange how Monokuma hasn’t done anything to stop us yet,” Tenko grumbles.

“He’ll probably wait until we try to escape to stop us,” Kirumi tells her. “Until then there’s nothing much he can actually do at the moment but wait.”

“Even then he won’t be able to do much,” Kokichi adds. “I bet Iruma is going to make something super powerful that’ll allow us to beat Monokuma up if he starts.”

“Tenko thought she was making something that’ll break the wall?” Tenko says.

Kirumi rubs her forehead. “She is, Ouma is just being silly.”

“I am known to be rather silly,” Kokichi responds.

“Yeah, Tenko has noticed,” Tenko sighs. “Yet you somehow manage to be one of the least degenerate males Tenko knows. The world certainly does work in mysterious ways.”

“It does indeed.” Kokichi grabs a spare plate of food from the table. “Now if you two will excuse me, I have a plate of food I need to deliver to a certain idiot astronaut. I hope he likes the basics because that’s all I’ve made for him.”

“Ah, please hold on just a moment.” Kirumi gestures for him to stand still before smiling wanly. “Make sure you look after yourself too. You’ve watched me do your bandages once before, correct? You should change them at your earliest convenience just to be on the safe side.”

“Okie dokie, no problem, Tojo!” Kokichi turns to leave.

“If you don’t change them then Tenko will,” Tenko warns him. “Because it wouldn’t be very good if you manage to get an infection before we leave. Tenko isn’t sure when the next time we’ll be able to get our hands on medical supplies so…”

“Geez, you both worry too much,” Kokichi says as he readjusts his grip on Kaito’s plate of food. He laughs at their twin looks of displeasure. “I was joking, I was joking! Why would I want to deal with an infection in the first place? I’ll change my bandages tonight, okay?”

“You better or Tenko will send you into orbit,” Tenko says before clearing her throat. “That was a joke. Tenko would never send one of her friends into orbit.”

“Phew! What a relief!” Kokichi smiles to himself as he leaves the dining room, his smile falling flat when he bumps into both Korekiyo and Tsumugi at the bottom of the stairs. “Oh.”

“Ah, has someone been making food?” Korekiyo asks curiously. “I must admit that I’m feeling peckish.”

“There’s a bowl of rice for everyone to share,” Kokichi tells him. “Buuut Shirogane isn’t allowed any unfortunately.”

Tsumugi smiles. “Don’t worry, I wasn’t hungry anyway.”

“I could perhaps go over my research as I eat,” Korekiyo all but mumbles to himself as he starts to pat his pockets. “Oh, hold on a second. Shirogane, I gave you my notebook to hold onto earlier. Do you still have it on you?”

“Um...” Tsumugi checks her pockets before smiling sheepishly. “Oh, I remember. I think I left it in your lab...”

Korekiyo sighs before turning back around to head upstairs. “For goodness sake, Shirogane.”

“I-I’m sorry!” Tsumugi calls up the stairs bashfully.

“Are you really?” Kokichi starts to walk away from her.

“Of course not.” She matches his pace. “Oh, are you eating in your room?”

“This is for Momota, duh.” Kokichi pulls the plate to his chest.

“You’ve both gotten rather close, haven’t you?” Tsumugi points out as they step outside. “I never thought I’d see the day where the two of you would ever get along.”

Kokichi sneers at her before entering the dormitory, rolling his eyes as dramatically as possible when she follows him inside. To his surprise, she just ends up going into her own room. Kokichi pauses before letting out a sigh and heads to Kaito’s room. It’s already unlocked for convenience sake so he presses down on the handle with his elbow and pushes the door open.

“Momota-chan, your favourite person has brought you dinner!”

He’s met with a snore before Kaito rolls over onto his side. Kokichi tries not to pout before putting the plate of food down onto the astronaut’s desk.

He looks at the still open door and decides that it’s probably for the best to keep it open now just so he can keep tabs on Tsumugi. The fact that she hasn’t done anything out of the ordinary yet to stop him is starting to chip away at him. All she’s done today is hang out with him and Korekiyo.

Kokichi takes a seat on the chair next to Kaito’s bed and slouches down on it, running both of his hands through his hair with a huff. He wonders if it’s worth it to wake Kaito up and annoy him by spoon feeding him again but decides against it. The astronaut looks so peaceful right now, snoring and all. Well, at least he was one peculiar way to know that Kaito’s still alive.

He closes his eyes and rests his arms over his chest before using Kaito’s bed as a footrest. Kaito barely reacts to the added weight on his bed. He thinks about prodding him before deciding to do the merciful thing of leaving him be.

Miu must be almost finished by now, right? She’s been hard at work all day so he doubts she’s not too far off from finishing whatever she’s making. He hopes that once he has whatever she makes in his hands then he’ll stop feeling so nauseous. He drums his fingers against his arms as he looks up at the ceiling with half lidded eyes, using Kaito’s bed as a crutch to help him rock his chair backwards without falling.

He supposes he does feel a tiny bit bad for locking Ryoma in his own lab but if he had to pick

between dealing with him or getting Tsumugi out of this killing game as soon as possible, well, there's only one obvious answer. If he's lucky, Ryoma might forgive him one day for being so awkward. Hey, if he's super lucky then everyone else might also be willing to forgive him for dying in front of them all. God, he *really* hopes that Monokuma isn't lying about the poison in the bangles being able to kill instantaneously.

If all goes to plan, he'll wake up in the school once again with Kiibo, Angie and Gonta. Monokuma will absolutely refuse to run a killing game with such a small number of people and Kokichi knows himself well enough to think he'll be able to catch onto the situation fairly quickly. He can easily imagine himself convincing Gonta to break Monokuma into pieces. Hmm, maybe he should write a note for himself to tell him to check Kiibo's audio...that's a very convenient way to catch up with everything.

He rocks himself almost soothingly on the chair with his foot, absentmindedly chewing on the skin around his thumb as he looks up at the ceiling blankly. He thinks it's a bit of a shame he's going to end up forgetting this game but, well, there's no point winding himself up over it. As a leader, he knows that someone has to make the hard decisions and unfortunately he's very accustomed to dealing with such hardships. At the end of the day, at least he's not actually dying. Just, temporarily, that's all.

The annoying nagging voice at the back of his head tells him that it's not as simple as that. He knows how badly he dealt with Angie, Gonta and Kiibo dying and that's with the knowledge of knowing they aren't actually dead. Hmm, maybe he is a bit of a mean one for encouraging everyone to break the wall so hastily.

It's just, he needs this win so badly right now. He feels like once Tsumugi is out of here then he'll be able to breathe properly. Her entire existence is just a morbid reminder that people will really stoop down to the lowest depths to get what they want. Kokichi has done his fair share of bad things in his life but to host a killing game? Even that's too much for him. Doesn't help that she's well aware that her killing game simulator is glitched but is still forcing games to happen anyway.

He thinks about how she's killed people to get to this point. How she threw Gonta under the bus to save her own skin. How she killed Angie for fun. How she made him fall into Kiibo and tormented him in that cold, horrifying room of hers.

She's been so calm today and he honestly can't tell if it's because she knows she has nothing to worry about or if she thinks that him ending her game is so appealingly despairing that she'll let him just end it so she can have the last laugh. He hates that she's managed to reduce him to such a paranoid state. Even now he's second guessing himself despite knowing he's literally doing all he can to make sure he gets his own way.

He snaps his eyes open as he remembers there's still something he actually needs to do. He scours the astronaut's room for a pen and some paper and reaches under Kaito's bed for his previously discarded notebook. There's a pen on Kaito's bedside and he very quickly jots something down before folding the piece of paper in half and writes something on the back.

'This is not a will.'

Ironic, he knows. He places the piece of paper on Kaito's bedside and leans back on his chair. He supposes out of everyone here Kaito can have the luxury of receiving his 'totally not a will' will. It's not like he's leaving much behind, just a small note to make sure Tsumugi actually leaves the game once he's gone. Out of everyone here, he believes in Kaito enough for him to see his 'will' through until the end.

Kaito also made sort of a big deal about how he believed in him too yesterday so if there's anyone who will carry Kokichi's will out to the end, it's him-

Hold on one fucking second.

Kokichi rocks the chair forward harshly so that it's back to standing on all four legs and stares at Kaito with a frown. How...how on earth did he overlook such a huge thing?

Didn't...Kaito tell him his instruction was that...he couldn't believe in people? (And how many times did Kaito slip up spectacularly yesterday?)

If Kaito's instruction really is that he can't believe in people then he'd be dead by now, like, he doubts there'd be enough poison in the school to refill his bangle to keep up with his slip ups. He presses his hands together and holds them under his chin before laughing weakly. Wow...he really just believed Kaito just like that, huh? He was so out of it that he just ate up Kaito's lie like a delicious treat.

He stands up and rummages around Kaito's room until he finds his instruction neatly tucked away in his bedside drawer. Maybe it's a good thing he's already frazzled beyond belief because if this was any other day he thinks he'd be a lot more pissed off right now. Now, he's vaguely impressed that Kaito managed to lie so quickly and so smoothly. Better yet, it's an absolute miracle that no one has figured out until now Kaito's been telling quite a huge lie.

Kokichi unfolds the letter and reads it quietly before chuckling. Of course. No wonder Kaito had been so pissed off when he read his instruction. No wonder he lied.

'Don't survive longer than two days.'

God, Kaito must've been ecstatic when he woke up to a letter telling him how to leave. No wonder he was so excited. He just thought Kaito was being his usual energetic self despite it being so early in the morning. He finds it hilariously ironic that the one of the reasons why he posted those letters so quickly was because Kaito said he didn't have much time left (a secret which he is very firmly taking to the grave thank you very much.)

"Looks like we both rubbed off on each other a little too much, Momo-chan," Kokichi whispers as he puts Kaito's instruction back. "Hmm, maybe we should just leave the lying to me and the believing to you from now on."

Wow, they really are just as bad as each other, huh? If Ryoma somehow manages to find out about Kaito's instruction too then he's probably going to knock both of their heads together.

It doesn't surprise him that Kaito lied about such a thing and at this point, he doesn't have the energy to shake him awake to yell at him. He's not that big of a hypocrite. Kokichi goes back to rocking his chair, crossing his arms as he looks at Kaito quietly. If he hadn't posted those letters then...

Kokichi sighs. No wonder Tsumugi has been so calm. This motive guarantees at least one death. She knows that he is on a self-destructive rampage to end the killing game and will stop at nothing to break down the wall. On the off chance he ends up taking too long, that's where Kaito's instruction comes in. Oh, if things were different then he'd be wringing her neck right now.

Still, there's a very hard to ignore lump growing in his throat that he desperately tries to swallow. The reality of what's going to happen next is...a *little* difficult to completely ignore. Something is telling him death by poison isn't the most appealing way to go.

He's going to forget everything that happened in this game too. He's going to forget how Tenko comforted him. He's going to forget about Ryoma begrudgingly putting up with him. He's going to forget Kirumi's warm cooking and attitude. He's going to forget Korekiyo's weird personality. He's going to forget Miu's horrendous choice of vulgar language. He's going to forget the several times Kiibo helped him out. He's going to forget about Gonta pleading for his life. He's going to forget that the only reason he's here right now is because Angie ended up at the wrong place at the wrong time.

He's going to forget Kaito.

Yet, despite all of this, he can't think of anything else more he wants to do than break the wall down and end this killing game. If the last thing he ever sees is white light sneaking through the cracks of a beautifully broken wall then he thinks that'll be okay.

He's a leader at heart. His loyal minions always come first.

(Well, friends. The finer details like that aren't important.)

He tenses up when he senses that someone is standing in the doorway but suddenly becomes very pleased when he spots Miu holding something extremely sci-fi looking to her chest. She looks like she ran all the way here.

"Eh? Why are you in Momota's room?" Miu asks before shaking her head. "Wait, I don't care."

"Nice to see you're being your usual lovely self," Kokichi says quietly. He eyes the laser gun-like invention in Miu's arms. "So are you completely done then?"

"Yep, busted my a-" Miu clears her throat. "I busted my *butt* off to get this bad boy done as soon as possible. I mean, Shinguji kept asking me how long I'd take like a little creep so I kept getting interrupted but I don't think I've done half bad considering."

"And you brought it straight to me like I asked too! You really are capable of following basic instructions! I'm impressed!"

"D-Don't be such a..." Miu pouts. "Don't be such an idiot. Once we leave and find a way to get these bangles off, I have so many names I need to call you. Been thinking of them all day too."

"I await with great anticipation," Kokichi says as he stretches his hands out. "Now *gimme*. I wanna take a looksie!"

"Nuh uh, you're not getting your hands on this until you tell me what you promised to tell me," Miu insists as she holds the gun just out of reach. Her expression slips into something more serious. "You need to tell me the truth about Kiibs."

"Oh yeah, I do..." Kokichi says as he clasps his hands behind his back. "*Buuut*...shouldn't we test the gun out first? If I tell you the truth and then it turns out your invention is as bad as your lie detector then I really won't be happy, you know?"

"My lie detector worked fine," Miu huffs. "Don't be such a tease and just tell me the truth already."

"Nope, I want a test run first."

"Ugh..." Miu looks at the gun and then at him with a very impatient expression before huffing.

"You know what, *fine*. Whatever. We'll try it out once and then you'll tell me everything. Deal?"

“Deal!”

Miu sets off before him, grumbling to herself as she leaves the dormitory. Kokichi turns to follow after her but pauses.

This is going to be the last time he’s going to see Kaito. He hesitates before heading back over to Kaito’s bed and looks down at him quietly. It...would be such a shame to wake him up when he looks so peaceful. Kokichi licks his lips before carefully readjusting the blankets that Kaito has very ungracefully kicked around in his sleep, smoothing them out gently with slightly trembling hands.

Things...could be worse right now, he thinks. Maybe if things were different and Kaito didn’t reach out a careful hand for him to take then the two of them might not be here together like this. Maybe they could’ve ended up as enemies. Maybe Kokichi would’ve taken advantage of Kaito’s death sentence.

It’s funny. Tsumugi was the one who said Kaito wouldn’t have even looked at him twice if he had other people to place his belief in. Yet here he is, willingly smoothing Kaito’s blankets out just so he can be a little more comfortable. Kokichi guesses he just got lucky this time.

Miu knocks on the dormitory door loudly, using her hand to gesture for him to hurry up. He rolls his eyes and finishes smoothing out a particularly wrinkled crease.

“Silly Momo-chan, thinking that keeping quiet about his instruction was such a good idea,” Kokichi murmurs. “The group needs a hero to guide them, not a liar. You and your infectious desire to believe in everyone are far more needed than anything else right now.”

He admires his handiwork and claps his hands together.

“Right, well, I’m off. See you around, spaceman. Between you and me, the biggest tragedy about this situation is that I’m going to have the absolute displeasure of having to see your face for the first time again. It was torturous enough the first time!”

Miu looks like she’s seconds away from tearing her hair out when he eventually makes it outside, walking with his hands behind his back and a nonchalant smile on his face.

“Hey, what are you doing standing around?” Kokichi huffs. “You’re wasting my time!”

“I’m wasting *your* time?!” Miu growls back. “Oh you have some nerve. Making me stand out here looking like a complete idiot all by myself whilst you hover over space-case like a weirdo.”

“Silence, wench! We have a super cool laser gun to try out so quit talking my ear off!” Kokichi looks around with his hands on his hips before pointing to a patch of wall that is near her lab. “Let’s try it out over there so the wall doesn’t end up breaking something important.”

“My lab is important, you...” Miu starts to grumble. “Ugh, fine. Whatever. It’s not like we’re going to stay here for long once we take the wall down anyway.”

She stomps towards the area he pointed out and starts to fiddle with the gun, twisting a dial around on the side with a smug grin.

“This bad boy has so many settings,” Miu tells him as a strip of neon blue starts to glow. “Even made a safety setting that’ll make a blast small enough so the entire wall doesn’t end up crushing us. I mean, we only need to make a hole big enough for us to go through, right?”

"I presume so," Kokichi responds with a hum. His palms feel sweaty. "So..."

"Hah? You're not expecting me to use it, right?" Miu thrusts the gun into his hands. "If this fails then I'm not taking the fall! Monokuma is probably going to bite our heads off once he sees a huge hole in his wall and I don't want him to pin the blame on me!"

"Geez, talk about being dramatic," Kokichi sighs as he aims the gun at the wall. "I just have to click down on the trigger, right?"

"One tiny click and it'll power up enough energy to cause a huge a-" Miu pauses. "A humongous explosion. I mean, not sure what sort of glass we're working with but glass breaks eventually, right?"

Kokichi frowns. "You're sure this is actually going to work, right?"

Miu waves a dismissive hand at him. "Who do you think you're talking to? Of course I know this is gonna work! I wouldn't have brought it to you if I thought it wasn't good enough to use!"

"Right, right..." Kokichi runs a finger along the trigger and closes an eye so he can readjust his aim better. Right, all he has to do is shoot the bottom part of the wall and make a hole. Simple.

(Why isn't Tsumugi running out to stop him? Why hasn't Monokuma intervened? They're just going to let him do this? He almost drops the gun from how sweaty his hands are getting. Something isn't right but he just can't put his finger on it. He's constantly on high alert thanks to Tsumugi and it has completely knocked his anxiety off balance.)

Miu raises an expectant eyebrow and puts a hand on her hip. "Well, what are you waiting for?"

(Welp, it's been fun but all games have to come to an end eventually.)

"I'm just making sure I'm aiming for the right area," Kokichi huffs. "Quit being impatient."

(He can see them in the glass' reflection. Angie, Gonta and Kiibo. All of them standing side by side and looking at him expectantly. If he was feeling more poetic then he'd probably think about apologising to them when he ends up joining them. The truth is none of them are going to remember the horrors of this game. Maybe that's for the best.)

He swallows and holds his finger above the trigger.

(It's such a beautiful evening. The stars are twinkling, the air is calm. It's a shame that on a perfect evening like this he's going to have to ruin the peace.)

Click.

The gun fires a beam of brilliant blue almost instantly. He hears the sound of cracking before he sees the damage he's done. When the blue dies down, he's greeted with the most amazing sight of a giant crack that webs almost halfway up the wall. He almost wants to touch it with his own hand to check that it's even real but from the loud whistle of approval from Miu, he knows he's not seeing things. Still, there's no hole just yet, which is fine.

Even as something pinches his wrist and even as he feels a trickle of blood run down his wrist, he lifts the gun up once more and presses down on the trigger with a satisfied smile.

And nothing happens.

“...hah?” Kokichi gives the gun a little shake.

“Aw man, I was hoping it wouldn’t do this,” Miu grumbles, clicking her tongue when Kokichi stares at her incredulously. “What, you didn’t think I’d be able to make something that would last long so quickly, right? I thought that maybe it could shoot twice in one go but it looks like it needs a little charge before-”

“*What* did you just say?” Kokichi asks quietly.

Miu recoils at his icy tone. “W-Well I barely managed to find a battery powerful enough to power this up in the first place...” She holds her curled hands up nervously. “D-Don’t look at me like that, I tried my best, okay?”

He feels numb. He blinks at her then back at the crack on the wall. Whilst the blast certainly weakened the glass, it didn’t outright break it. Even if he pressed his hand against the crack, he wouldn’t be able to knock the glass aside himself.

In short, he needs to use the gun again.

Said gun needs to charge.

There is blood running down his wrist and splashing on the floor.

Hmm.

“W-What the heck is wrong with your arm?” Miu asks as she eventually notices the blood, pointing at the tiny puddle with a pointed finger. “Did you catch it on something?”

Kokichi blinks.

The poison is certainly taking a long time to take effect. He lifts his wrist up to his face and looks at it owlishly, blinking slowly as another trickle of blood creeps down his hand.

He looks at Miu and blinks again before saying, “I’m supposed to be dead right now.”

“Oh.” Miu pauses before spluttering. “*Wait*, what did you just say?!”

She rolls his sleeve up and checks around the bangle but there’s no clear signs of him being poisoned at all. The needle in his wrist must’ve only just embedded itself a little further once he activated it.

“You’re not just messing around, are you?” Miu asks him with a frown as she prods his skin. “Dude, you’re bleeding but that’s it. Seriously, if you’re trying to get out of telling me what happened to Kiibs then I’m going to kick your a-”

“Ah...what was it Monokuma said?” Kokichi murmurs. “First come first served?”

He feels like he’s floating, that he’s not even in his own body. He looks at the crack once more before down at the gun in his hands. It’s lost its cool neon blue streak. Kokichi carefully places the gun on the floor and everything blurs. One second he’s placing the gun on the grass and the next second he’s shaking Miu’s shoulders wildly.

“*You had one job!*” He hears himself yell. “All I asked for was a something to break down the wall and you couldn’t even fucking do that properly!”

“H-Hey!” Miu pushes him back. Her face turns red as she defensively huffs. “I did what you told

me to do! I was working with the absolute basics, you ungrateful *dick!*” Her eyes go wide as her own bangle jabs her. However, she receives the same results of only the needle jabbing her. “Holy shit...”

He’s not sure if the sound he makes is a laugh or a sob. “Why make a damn gun that needs charging when you know we need to break the wall as efficiently as possible, you absolute dozy cow?! What, did you think Monokuma would just let us twiddle our thumbs and wait for the gun to charge to use it again?!” He presses his palms into his eyes to force away the frustrated tears that are making themselves known. “*Fuck!*”

“I was fucking hoping myself that it would make a hole in one shot!” Miu growls. She angrily pushes him again. “You try making something so powerful with a short time limit and next to no resources! You’re fucking lucky I got something made in the first place, especially in such a short amount of time too! Where’s my damn thank you, you selfish prick?!”

“You want me to thank you? What for?!” Kokichi jabs his finger at the crack. “Do you *see* a fucking hole? We’re not better off than we were before!”

“Use your pathetic pea sized brain, dipshit,” Miu snaps. “One more hit and there’ll be a hole in no time-”

“What part of first come first served do you not get?!” Kokichi swallows heavily before grabbing at her hands in an attempt to get her to stop pushing him. “Your fucking bangle just went off too you clueless idiot! The only reason we’re both alive is because someone is dead and I wanted the wall down before something like this happened!”

Realisation dawns on Miu’s face and she lets her hands slump from his shoulders. “Oh *shit*, fuck, you’re right...”

He doesn’t want to be right. It feels like the entire world is crumbling around him. He scrambles to find something to keep him grounded. He’d do anything for someone to tell him that everything is going to be okay. He’d take his bangle activating over this any day.

“T-That means we gotta go look for a body, right?” Miu says slowly, wringing her hands together nervously. “Because someone clearly managed to set their bangle off before us so...”

Kokichi nods his head as he runs his hands down his face, tugging on his skin harshly. He wants the ground to swallow him up. He wants a fucking meteorite to smash through the wall and destroy everything. He refuses to believe that this is happening right now, that someone managed to die just at the finish line.

This is all Tsumugi’s fault.

Even just imagining her face is enough to spark a reaction from him. He’s had enough of her, god, he’s reached his *limit* with her. He’s *done*, he’s genuinely done. This is just too much. *It’s too much!*

Miu pulls a face at him as he struggles to hold back a manic snort, covering his mouth with his hands. Tsumugi’s been calm all day. Of course she’s been calm! She said it herself, he *can’t win* in this situation. He shouldn’t have even tried to win! He became too *soft* and allowed himself to hope that he could end things more efficiently, in a way that means less death and tragedy.

He’s stupid. He’s so, *so* stupid. He’s vaguely aware that he’s giggling like a madman as he stumbles away from the wall. Miu skittishly picks up her gun as he wanders towards the school since that’s

probably the best place to start looking, right? After all, someone must've set their bangle off like an inconsiderate asshole. Kaito's asleep and Tsumugi...no, she wouldn't have set hers off for no reason.

Kokichi reaches the school alone and briefly wonders where Miu has gone. Oh well, it's not like he wants her around anyway. She's an incompetent waste of his time. She had one job! One single job! He almost trips as he pushes the door open, throwing his head back when he hears someone call his name.

He sees Kaito leaving the dormitory with a very confused look on his face and Kokichi's 'will' fisted in one hand. "Ouma, wait there just a second!" Kaito clearly then must notice the cracked lines running up the wall as he mouths out a silent 'holy shit' to himself.

Kokichi, very unhelpfully, does not wait and heads inside, still trying to swallow back giggles behind his arm. He bites down on his sleeve in a vain attempt to keep quiet but hey, the amount of fucks he can give right now rhymes with hero. Spoilers, it's zero by the way.

Kaito nearly slams the door from its hinges chasing after him, letting out a surprised yell when he realises that Kokichi is already halfway up the stairs. "Ouma, I thought I told you to wait!"

"I'm," Kokichi says before snorting, pressing a hand to his mouth, "very busy right now, Momota!"

"You're bleeding-"

"Someone is dead!" Kokichi practically sings as he uses the bannister to haul himself up the stairs. "But are you surprised? Of *course* someone is dead!"

Kaito's eyes go wide before he all but chases him up the stairs, the piece of paper in his hand very easily forgotten as he instead shoves it into his pocket. "Ouma, what the hell are you-"

"We've all taken another major L, Momota," Kokichi says. "Because someone rudely decided to die despite knowing that we've got a chance to escape right on our doorstep! Honestly, it's very callous of them."

The astronaut sucks in a sharp breath when he spots the line of pink that's soaked into Kokichi's shirt sleeve. "You're bleeding-"

Kokichi dismisses him as he slides open Ryoma's lab door and looks around before opening the bathroom door. Whilst he is mildly surprised to see the bathroom empty, it doesn't surprise him too much. The tennis player probably has some sort of super secret technique that helps him slip from handcuffs. Welp, time to do some more aimless searching! Fun times!

"Ouma, what do you mean someone is dead?" Kaito firmly stops him in his tracks by blocking the hallway with his body. "Talk to me. What do you know?"

"Absolutely nothing apparently!" Kokichi answers. He darts under his arms and towards the next flight of stairs. "The only thing I truly know is how stupid I've been for thinking things could ever go my way for once!"

Kaito frowns. "Seriously, what's wrong? You're-"

He's shaking. Kokichi is very well aware that his hands are trembling violently and that there's a thick lump in his throat that has made itself at home. He giggles helplessly again before shaking his head and heading upstairs once again. He's got a body to look for!

The creepiness of the fourth floor doesn't unsettle him as much as it should as he starts to look around, cupping his hands above his eyes in a desperate attempt to find someone. He can hear Kaito grumble to himself about not liking this floor but he ignores him and turns a corner and...

...spots Korekiyo wipe blood from a sickle with Tenko's green bow.

Korekiyo blinks slowly at him, his hand freezing as they both make eye contact. Kokichi's eyes flicker from Korekiyo's face to the blood on the sickle and then finally to the bloody green bow.

"Ouma, can you fucking stand still for one second so I can-"

Kaito's voice spooks Korekiyo. The anthropologist darts into the middle room of the random three rooms on this floor and pulls the door shut loudly.

"What the fuck." Kaito abruptly stands still, nearly crashing into Kokichi, who blinks slowly at the wall. "That was Shinguji right? He...was wiping blood from a weapon with Chabashira's bow..."

It looks like even Kaito is struggling to process what he just saw. The astronaut frowns before everything hits him at once. Kokichi doesn't see Kaito's face but *god*, he *instantly* feels the anger rolling from him. Kaito starts to pull on the door furiously before whacking it repeatedly with his fist when it doesn't open.

"Shinguji, you better open the fucking door right now before-"

"T-There you are!" Miu gasps for breath as she stands at the end of the hallway with her hands on her knees. "You *fucker*, you left without me! Did you not hear me tell you I was going to put the gun on charge?!"

"Gun?!" Kaito pauses before gritting his teeth and going back to basically punching the door. "Open the door, Shinguji!"

"Hah? What's going on?" Miu asks with a tilt of her head. "What's Shinguji done?"

"He was holding a bloody sickle!" Kaito responds whilst continuing to fight with the door. "For fucks sake..."

Miu's eyes go wide. "Oh shit, you don't think that..."

"He needs to open the door so I can find out what he's done," Kaito growls. "I know you can hear me! Open the damn door!" He starts to kick it heatedly.

Kokichi can't get the image of Tenko's bloody bow from his head. Whilst it's a rather insignificant thing, the sight of it covered in blood alone is enough to silence his hysterical giggles. It's enough to completely extinguish his previous anger, reducing the white hot fire that was fuelling him into wisps of airy smoke.

He thinks, not Tenko. Not her.

Kaito changes tactics as he instead yells through the door, "Chabashira, are you in there?! Respond if you can hear me!"

The lack of response is nauseating. However, as much as he wants to grab the door and slide it open himself so he can find out the truth, he's frozen and it's not due to the fact that it feels like ice has filled his veins.

If he was at breaking point before, well, he's certainly exceeded that now. Oh, without a doubt he's reached a new low point in his life. The chance to end the game with just four casualties was just within his reach and now it's been snatched away from him. He doesn't even know why he's so surprised. He's never going to win. He gets that now.

He wraps his arms around himself as he quietly turns away and leaves, staggering down the hallway with a distant look in his eyes. He thinks maybe Kaito is calling after him, he thinks that Miu is trying to get his attention by waving a hand in his face. He's not really sure anymore.

Kokichi is by the stairs when he almost walks into Ryoma, who stares at him with a surprised expression before quickly steeling himself. Man, Ryoma looks *pissed*. Kokichi sways as the tennis player says something to him, something he doesn't hear. He thinks about heading down the stairs when Ryoma starts to tug him away with a frown on his face.

The tennis player must catch on with what's happening rather quickly as he pokes his head around the corner. He must've heard Kaito yelling. Kokichi doesn't hear Kaito yelling, he hears muffled noises and blood pumping in his ears.

Ryoma hesitates before helping Kaito whilst Miu rather uselessly stands to one side, chewing her fingernails. Kokichi blinks and looks down at the floor before something catches his eye.

Tsumugi appears at the end of the hallway and when she realises that no one is paying attention to her, she *smiles* at him.

She might as well have waved a red flag in his face.

"*You.*" His voice sounds hazy but he sure as hell hears the malice deeply rooted in it. "*This is all your fault!*"

He lunges for her and he hears a lot of screaming, a lot of yelling. Kokichi barely manages to brush his fingertips against her blazer jacket before someone is hauling him back. There are strong arms wrapped around his middle as he's held back kicking and screaming. He has no clue what words are coming from his mouth but from the look on Tsumugi's face, he doubts he's saying anything kind at the moment.

"Ouma, stop it!" Ah, Kaito must be the one who is holding him. He squeezes him tighter. "What are you *doing?!*"

Good question, what is he doing? He's really not got a clue. The only thing he knows is that he hates Tsumugi Shirogane with a passion and that everything is her fault. The only thing that's stopping her from having a broken nose right now is Kaito holding Kokichi back. Kokichi furiously struggles in Kaito's hold.

"Get *off* me!" He screeches. Forget rock bottom. Forget digging an even deeper hole. Kokichi is freefalling to a completely different sort of brand new low.

"H-He's gone fucking insane," Miu whimpers, backing away until her back hits the wall.

"Truma, you're *not* helping!" Kaito yells at her, grunting when Kokichi fights his hold even more. "Ouma, you need to calm-"

"*She can't keep getting away with this!*"

Kaito grits his teeth as he barely manages to wrestle Kokichi's hand away from slipping from his grip. "You're not making any sense! You need to-"

“Don’t tell me what to *do!*”

He elbows Kaito in the stomach. *Hard.* It’s the perfect trick to get the astronaut to let go of him but the moment Kaito falls to one knee, panting heavily as he puts a hand to his mouth, the red mist leaves Kokichi’s vision.

Kaito gags and it doesn’t surprise Kokichi too much when pink seeps through his fingers. The urge to fight leaves his bones, even though he can still see Tsumugi standing at the end of the hallway from the corner of his eye.

Oh, he’s hurt Kaito.

“Ouma,” Ryoma impatiently snaps, quickly diverting his attention from opening the door to standing by Kaito’s side. He rubs the astronaut’s shoulder. “You alright, Momota?”

Kaito nods before shakily wiping his mouth with his sleeve. “Y-Yeah...just give me a moment.”

“Holy shit, I didn’t think you were this bad!” Miu recoils. “You’re not infectious, right?”

“Of course he isn’t,” Ryoma snaps at her.

“Momota, are you okay?” Tsumugi asks gently. She must be feeling particularly brave as she makes her way over to Kaito. “That was a nasty cough you just let out...”

“I said I’m fine,” Kaito grumbles, his voice muffled due to his jacket sleeve blocking his mouth.

Ryoma looks frustrated before he impatiently points a half eaten candy cigarette towards Kokichi. “Ouma, I have no clue what’s going on with you at the moment but there isn’t any time for all of this. Can I trust you to keep an eye on Momota whilst I get the door open?”

Kokichi hesitates before nodding slowly. Ryoma looks like he doesn’t entirely believe him but turns his attention back to the door anyway along with Tsumugi. Kokichi can vaguely hear Ryoma filling in what’s going on to Tsumugi as he fights with the door.

Kaito looks away when Kokichi looks at him, using the wall to support himself as he pulls himself up from the floor. “M-Man, your elbows are sharp...”

Kokichi struggles to think of a response. He ends up also diverting his gaze as he fiddles with the sleeves of his shirt.

He hears a particularly loud thump and turns his attention to the door. Both Ryoma and Tsumugi are tugging on it with their hands. Korekiyo must be holding it shut from the other side.

Why...is this happening? Why is Korekiyo hiding in a room? Why was he wiping blood from a sickle with Tenko’s bow?

Where’s Kirumi?

Wasn’t she taking a walk with...Tenko...

“Oh!” Tsumugi lets out a surprised noise as Korekiyo pushes a piece of paper under the door. She stops pulling on it for a moment to pick it up and read it, her brows furrowing together as she finishes. “It’s his instruction. It says he has to send at least two more friends to his sister before his time is over here at the Ultimate Academy.”

The wording of his instruction is just an ugly realisation that he’s played right into Tsumugi’s

hands once again. Somehow, somehow, the bangles are loosely connected to each other with a couple of exceptions.

“Send friends to his sister?” Ryoma echoes with a scowl. “What does that mean?”

“It means Monokuma gave me an opportunity to send my sister even more lovely friends,” Korekiyo answers through the door, causing everyone in the hallway to jump. “Would you all please stop pulling on the door for just a second.”

“Shinguji!” Kaito quickly takes advantage of Korekiyo’s sudden willingness to talk. “What the hell have you done to Chabashira?”

“And Tojo too, right?” Tsumugi adds. “She’s not with us either.”

“I’ve sent them to join my sister,” Korekiyo says.

Ryoma frowns. “Shinguji, you told me when we hung that one time that your sister is dead.”

“She is,” Korekiyo responds.

“Then what the fuck do you mean you sent Chabashira and Tojo to join your sister?” Miu snaps.

“I think he’s killed them, Iruma,” Tsumugi says.

Shut up. Kokichi would do almost anything for Tsumugi to just *shut up*.

Ryoma pales at her words and goes back to pulling on the door hastily. “Shinguji, open the damn door.”

“But then Monokuma will kill me,” Korekiyo says. “And I simply refuse to die when we’re all so close to leaving. Please, hear me out. I understand that all of you must think I’ve done a horrible thing but I was simply following my instruction. Once Iruma is done making her invention then the walls are going to be taken down right away, correct? As soon as we leave then our time here at the academy will be counted as over.”

“So you picked yourself over Chabashira and Tojo?” Tsumugi asks coldly.

“I assure you that neither of their deaths are in vain,” Korekiyo responds. “They’ll both make wonderful friends for my sister-”

“You shouldn’t have killed them!” Kaito yells back before punching the door with gritted teeth. “They were both our friends! They both wanted to leave with everyone! Why did you...why did you take that opportunity away from them?!”

“Momota, I understand you’re upset-”

“I’m more than upset!” Kaito slams the door again. “Once I get my hands on you I’m-”

“If you open the door and see their bodies then the body discovery will go off,” Korekiyo explains. “And Monokuma will kill me. I understand that you all must hate me with a passion right now but please consider your options for a moment. Is it really worth sending me to my death over this?”

“Of course it fucking is you idiot!” Miu snarls. “I don’t want to leave this place with someone like you!”

“You want us to...turn a blind eye to what you’ve done?” Ryoma asks incredulously. He does,

however, step away from the door ever so slightly.

“There’s no way we can do that,” Tsumugi says with a frown. “Shinguji, you’ve just killed two people. How on earth can we just let you get away with that? Chabashira and Tojo...they deserve so much more than us letting you walk away from all this.”

Kokichi bites down on his tongue so hard he can taste blood.

“But...” Ryoma clears his throat uncomfortably. “Letting Monokuma punish him just seems...”

“...damn it...” Kaito rests his head against the door. “Damn it!”

“Their deaths were quick, I can all assure you that,” Korekiyo offers quietly. “Tojo caught onto what I was planning rather quickly and ended up setting her bangle off whilst she was keeping Chabashira safe. It was such a beautiful display of humanity-”

“Dude, shut up,” Kaito growls warningly. “I don’t want to hear any more of your bullshit.”

“Very well then.” Korekiyo goes quiet.

“Tch, we’re not letting him get away with this, right?” Miu asks as she puts her hands on her hips. “What’s stopping him from killing all of us when we leave this place? The fucker is going to stab us in the back the first chance he gets!”

“His instruction also implies this isn’t the first time he’s killed people for his sister either,” Tsumugi adds. “Remember, his instruction was to send two more friends to his sister. He’s plainly a mass murderer or something.”

“But he’s right about Monokuma killing him if we set the body discovery off,” Ryoma murmurs. “We’ll be basically sending him to his death if we force the door open.”

“Who the fuck cares?” Miu snaps. “I don’t want that asshole anywhere near me! The sooner we get rid of him, the better!”

“We’ll be stooping down to Monokuma’s level though,” Kaito says with a pained expression.

“Chabashira and Tojo deserve justice,” Tsumugi says firmly before tugging on the door once more, letting out a surprised noise as it slides open easily.

Korekiyo quickly uses his body to block anyone from looking into the room. He must’ve not expected Tsumugi to pull on the door so suddenly. Whilst he doesn’t look nervous, he does look more sweaty than usual. “This certainly is a rare experience. I’ve never had to beg for my life before...”

“Don’t you dare make it sound like you’re enjoying this,” Kaito hisses. He sounds disgusted.

“You won’t be doing yourself any favours,” Ryoma adds darkly.

Korekiyo clears his throat. “Ah, my apologies-”

“We don’t have time for this!” Tsumugi shoves a surprised Korekiyo to the side. He stumbles with a yell as Tsumugi storms into the room.

Kokichi quickly looks away, covering his eyes with his hands. From the lack of a body discovery announcement playing, Ryoma and Kaito must’ve not looked into the room yet either. He knows Miu has since he hears her suck in a sharp breath before whispering ‘what the fuck’ to herself.

Korekiyo blinks as he realises he's still in the clear and pulls himself from the room slowly. "Are you three choosing to...spare me?"

"I'm refusing to fucking stoop down to Monokuma's level," Kaito mumbles. "Especially when we're able to leave soon."

"You're on thin ice," Ryoma warns before shoving his hands into his pockets. "Besides, I'd be a bit of a hypocrite if I said you deserved to die for your crimes. If someone like me is still alive then..."

"You guys do realise what he's done, right?" Tsumugi emerges from the room. "Chabashira and Tojo are dead! He's killed the two sweetest people here!"

"I thought you were all fuck buddies with Chabashira too," Miu adds. "Kinda shitty of you all to turn your backs on her now."

Kaito hits the wall loudly with a clenched fist. "I'm not turning my back on her! But I know she wouldn't want anyone to die because of her! Even her own killer-"

"You're all just delaying the inevitable, you know?" Tsumugi suddenly points out. "We're all aware that Tojo and Chabashira are dead. Sooner or later Monokuma might just take that as three people seeing their bodies and force us to do a trial anyway. I plainly don't think there's any way around this situation but to accept that Shinguji has to be punished."

"T-There's always another option!" Kaito insists but the frown on his face suggests that he is anything but confident at the moment. "Shirogane, you don't have to be scared of Monokuma! Don't give him what he wants just because he might get angry at us later!"

Poor, naïve Kaito. He really has no clue who he's talking to.

Tsumugi sighs sadly. "I'm plainly stating that there's no point in hiding from the truth. This is Monokuma's killing game. No matter how much we try to fight against him, we always lose. Isn't it easier to just...give up? As long as Monokuma is in control, we don't have a choice."

Kaito looks stunned whilst Ryoma's frown deepens.

Kokichi freezes as he realises Tsumugi has a point. She always has a point. The plan for him to be the only person who dies this time around is already impossible to achieve. He was so stupid to think he could end this game with as little death as possible. He was a fool to believe he could ever beat Tsumugi at her own game. He sees that now. He should've kept his head down, he should've just went along with his original plan.

He shouldn't have believed everything was going to be okay.

"C'mon, I don't like what Monokuma is doing either but this isn't something we can just turn a blind eye to," Tsumugi says. "I plainly think...resisting is pointless. As long as Monokuma is in charge of this game then there's nothing we can do."

He slowly removes his hands from his face and turns his head slowly to the side, ignoring the sudden intake of breath from Korekiyo as he realises what's about to happen.

Tsumugi's right. As long as she and Monokuma are in charge, there's nothing anyone can do to win against them.

Under the dim lighting of the hallway, it almost looks like there's something swirling in Kokichi's

eyes.

The body discovery plays loudly the moment his eyes land on Tenko's hand.

Korekiyo is boiled alive before a ghostly apparition of his sister throws salt at him.

The ride up from the trial room is understandably tense. Tsumugi is humming in the corner to herself as Kaito barely manages to stand in another corner. Ryoma tries his best to support him but is clearly struggling.

"Hey," Miu grits out as the elevator doors finally open. She grabs Kokichi's shoulder. "You never told me how Kiibo died."

"Iruma, is now really the time?" Kaito sighs before he blinks. "Wait. What did you just say?"

"This asshole," Miu says as she shakes Kokichi's shoulder, "told me he knows Kiibo's accident wasn't just an accident. Kiibo was killed and Ouma is going to fucking tell me who killed him."

Ryoma narrows his eyes. "Kid?"

Kokichi swallows and turns around. Since Tsumugi was the last person to leave the elevator, she's currently standing at the back of the group. There's a smug smile on her face and she starts to puff out her chest almost proudly. Oh? Is she not even going to try to pretend that she's a good person anymore? Is *this* the hill she's choosing to die on?

Tough shit. There's nothing more he wants right now than to wipe that smug smile from her face.

"Hey dipship, I'm talking to you!" Miu glares at him fiercely. "Who killed Kiibo?"

"I did," Kokichi says and watches as Tsumugi's smile slips from her face.

It's a lie that tastes bitter on his tongue but the moment he starts lying, he just can't stop. A horrified expression flickers on Miu's face as he grabs Miu's collar and pulls her close. From over Miu's shoulder he can see that Tsumugi is clearly caught off guard and is struggling to figure out how to respond to his manic confession.

"I killed him," Kokichi tells her as an abnormal smile twists on his face. "He knew too much and that *plainly* just wasn't okay."

"You..." Miu looks tragically lost. She swallows. "You..."

"Ouma, what are you on about?" Kaito pushes himself to the front of the group with a frown. "What-"

"Kiibo found out how to end the game far too early!" Kokichi explains, roughly letting go of Miu's collar so he can twirl around on his foot. He spreads his arms out wide as more lies spew from his mouth. "And, and, and, guess what else he found out? C'mon, guess. *Guess!*"

"What?!" Miu snaps.

Kokichi lies. "He found out..." He looks up at the glass wall with a smile. "That this isn't only Monokuma's game. It's mine too. This is *my* killing game."

If Tsumugi wants to take everything from him then two can play at that game.

Miu whimpers as she instantly stumbles away from him, almost knocking over Ryoma in the process. “You’re fucking crazy. He’s fucking crazy! Look at him!”

“Ouma, why are you lying-” Kaito doesn’t get the chance to finish.

“Are you asking me why I’m lying? You’re asking a liar why he tells lies?” Kokichi giggles as he doubles over from laughing to hard, holding his stomach as his shoulders shake. “Nope, this is the truth and nothing but the truth! This is my killing game! *Mine!*”

Ryoma’s brows furrow as he chews on his bottom lip. “Kid-”

“What, are you going to tell me that you don’t believe me?” Kokichi pouts. “But wasn’t Momota the one who made it clear he believes in everyone? If he wants something to believe in then he should believe in this truth! This is my killing game and I am the...I am the king of this school!”

What an ugly turn of events. This is the exact opposite to bowing out peacefully when you know you’ve lost a game. However, enough is enough. His mind is so clouded with grief that he can’t think straight anymore. There’s only one thing on Kokichi’s mind and that is getting the last laugh, to make Tsumugi squirm.

He thinks it might be working.

Tsumugi is wringing her hands timidly by her waist, her previous cocky smile nowhere in sight. Oh, did she not expect this? Did she not expect that pushing someone over and over and over again would cause something like this to happen? Poor little Tsumugi, she’s not going to get the satisfaction of confessing to her crimes. Kokichi’s heart *bleeds* for her. *Not.*

“Kiibo...Kiibo found out way too soon about taking the wall down!” Kokichi says. “And found out my involvement with the killing game! I couldn’t have that now could I? Even when he tried to restrain me, I found a way to escape and he ended up chasing me around before falling down the stairs like an idiot! Whilst one person might say his death was an accident...” He puts a finger to his lips. “Well, he never would’ve ended up in the state he’s in if it wasn’t for me.”

Miu’s jaw tightens but before she can yell at him, Kaito beats her to it. “What the hell are you on about, Ouma? Is this some sort of sick joke? Why are you-”

“He has to be lying,” Ryoma says with a low voice. “Look at him, he’s clearly not okay-”

“Oh I’ve never felt better!” Kokichi responds with a spin, excitedly pumping his fists. “In fact, this is the *best* I’ve felt! Even getting away with Angie’s murder and getting you all to think Gonta was the culprit didn’t feel this good!” He puts a hand to his mouth. “Whoops, did I say that out loud?”

“Huh?” Miu’s jaw drops. “What the fuck did you just say?”

“Did...he just confess to...” Tsumugi hugs herself tightly.

“What bullshit are you spewing?!” Kaito’s fists are trembling “Ouma-”

“Someone had to start the killing game,” Kokichi says before puffing his cheeks out. “And no one was smart enough to kill someone else so of course I had to intervene! Angie was just there, you know? So I-”

“Ouma, you were also stabbed,” Ryoma points out. “And Shirogane was there too. Are you telling me that she saw you kill Angie and kept quiet about it this entire time?”

“Yep!” Kokichi easily answers. “Do you seriously think someone as timid as Shirogane would stand up to someone like me? I told her as long as she keeps her mouth shut, I wouldn’t hurt her. And look! I kept my promise!”

“That doesn’t explain how you ended up stabbed. What, did Angie fight back?” Miu hisses.

Kokichi hums. “Nope! But I had to cover my tracks now, didn’t I? I needed to figure out some way to make people less suspicious of me so I,” Kokichi says before mimicking shoving a knife into his gut, “you know, stabbed myself to also make it look like I had been attacked.”

Miu grimaces. “Holy shit, you’re actually batshit insane, aren’t you?”

“He’s lying,” Ryoma tells her firmly. “Ouma, why are you doing this?”

“I’m confessing to my crimes,” Kokichi says before letting out a loud sigh of relief. “And *boy* does it feel *so good*! I’m just so relieved I didn’t have to get my hands dirty with the bangle motive! I mean, of course I wrote everyone’s instructions but-”

“That’s enough!” Kaito grabs his scarf tightly and pulls him forward. Kokichi almost stumbles but manages to not fall. He blinks before smiling.

“Why hello there, Momota.”

Kaito shakes him slightly. “What the hell is your problem, Ouma? You seriously can’t expect me to believe all this bullshit, right? Why are you doing this?”

“Oh, that’s simple,” Kokichi says. “I’m bored of this game so I think I’ll just stop it now.”

Kaito’s grip falters before he growls and doubles down on his interrogation for answers. “You’re *lying*. I *know* you’re lying-”

“I’m *nooot*!” Kokichi insists before putting a hand on top of the hand buried in his scarf. “This game? *My* game? I’m done with it now.”

“Of course it’s fucking finished. Do you seriously expect us to let you continue the damn game after a confession like that?! Miu snarls. “You basically just admitted to killing everyone here! You must be a special type of dense to think we’re just going to let you get away with-”

“Ah, did you not hear me? I just said this game is over,” Kokichi says. “So if you want a class trial...hmm, I’m afraid you’re out of luck.”

“W-What?” Tsumugi puts a hand to her chest with a grimace. “You can’t just decide-”

“Silence, a king is talking! Peasants have no say around here!” Kokichi says with a sniff.

“Hey!” Kaito shakes him roughly. “Ouma, what the hell do you think you’re playing at?! Where’s the Ouma I believe in-”

“You and your *stupid fucking belief*,” Kokichi mutters before giggling softly. “Look around, Momota. We’re in *hell* yet you still dare to hope that things get better. Open your eyes!” Kokichi pushes Kaito’s hand from his scarf. “Things can’t possibly get worse than they already are! Everyone keeps dying one by one and as much as we all say we’re going to do better next time, someone always ends up dead! How the hell can you still pick to believe in people?!”

Kaito swallows before putting the back of his hand to his mouth, choking back a wet cough.

“Momota,” Kokichi continues as he gestures around with his hands wildly, “where is your beloved belief now?”

“Alright, *that’s it.*” Ryoma carefully nudges Kaito out of the way. “This has gone on for too long-”

“You’re right, it has,” Kokichi agrees. “This entire conversation is boring now. So...”

“Ouma, you can’t just drop all of this on us and then expect to just walk away,” Ryoma says. “Never mind the fact that I refuse to believe-”

Kokichi rolls his eyes at the word ‘believe’ heavily. “Ugh, there we go *again.* I’ve *just* given you a truth to believe in, what more do you want?!”

“Justice for Kiibo, obviously,” Miu yells. “Get over here so I can kick your ass!”

“Oh yikes, someone’s angry!” Kokichi pulls a face as he dodges Miu’s swipe to grab him. “Well, obviously I’m not going to stand around and let you hit me so peace out losers! You can all do whatever the hell you want, I’m done with this game!”

Kokichi dashes off and Miu screeches before chasing after him.

Oh he’s really done it now, hasn’t it? He thinks, ah, this is what despair must feel like. This is what it feels like to lose all hope. He’s sinking fast, drowning in such an overwhelming feeling with no chance to breathe.

This is what he gets for thinking he could win.

He's been so stupid.

(He just wants to stop feeling like he’s constantly holding his breath.)

—

Ryoma Hoshi wouldn’t say he’s particularly good at telling a truth from a lie but from the moment the trial ended, he knows for certain that Kokichi has completely lost it. Something must’ve caused him to have such a public breakdown, yet the more he thinks about it the more he realises how many things could’ve been the final straw.

The blood on Kokichi’s sleeve, the giant crack in the wall, Tenko is *dead*...the list just goes on and on.

“He’s...crazy, isn’t he?” Tsumugi murmurs softly, adjusting her glasses before nervously hugging herself.

Kaito doesn’t respond to her as he continues to press the back of his hand against his mouth heavily. However, even from where Ryoma is standing he can tell that there’s more blood trickling from the astronaut’s mouth.

Ryoma doesn’t entertain her with an answer. “Momota, you alright?”

Kaito swallows before grimacing. “...he sure does know how to use his elbows, huh?”

“Let’s get you sat down somewhere,” Ryoma says before his eyes widen with alarm when Kaito starts to gag. Oh, he’s about to be sick. Isn’t there a bathroom in the hangar? “C’mon, let’s get you to a bathroom.”

“B-But what about Ouma and Iruma? Did you see the look in her eyes?” Tsumugi frets. “If she gets her hands on him then she’ll kill him!”

Kaito’s eyes go wide with realisation and he pulls away from Ryoma, frantically gesturing towards the direction Kokichi and Miu went in with his eyes. Ryoma sighs. “Momota, I don’t think I’m comfortable with leaving you.”

“I’ll look after him,” Tsumugi says. “Hoshi, I really don’t think we should leave those two alone together for too long.”

As if to prove a point, Miu starts to scream from somewhere in the distance. She sounds *more* than angry. “I don’t want to leave Momota either.”

Kaito gasps as he pulls his hand away from his mouth long enough to speak. “Y-You heard what she said, Iruma will die if she kills him.”

Ryoma frowns. “You’re more concerned about Iruma?”

Kaito pauses before clicking his tongue with a heavy grimace. “Didn’t you hear what Ouma said, h-he told us he’s given us a t-truth to believe in. So...” He coughs. “So...”

“Find it hard to believe he’s been working with Monokuma all this time,” Ryoma grumbles, tugging on his hat. “Hey, Shirogane? He said you’ve known about him for a long time. What do you think of all this?”

“Oh, um...” Tsumugi looks away with a distant look in her eyes. “Well...”

“He said he killed Angie,” Ryoma says. “And you were there. Was he telling the truth?”

Tsumugi’s hands twitch by her side before she nods with a frown. “Y-Yeah...”

Ryoma narrows his eyes before shoving his hands into his pockets. “Right, seems he...” He looks at Kaito uncertainly. Kaito swallows before nodding subtly. “He wasn’t lying about working with Monokuma then.”

Something still isn’t sitting right with him. Ryoma pulls a face before his eyes go wide once again when Kaito suddenly pales significantly. Kaito lunges forward, slapping his hand over his mouth, barely managing to stop the next lot of blood from dripping on the floor.

“I-I’ll take him to a bathroom to help clean him up,” Tsumugi offers before hooking Kaito’s arm around her shoulder. “Hoshi...I really think you should find Ouma and Iruma before something bad happens.”

That’s what he wants to do but...does he really want to leave Kaito alone with Tsumugi of all people? There’s something Ryoma...*really* doesn’t like about Tsumugi, there’s something about her that rubs him up the wrong way. Watching her force open the door so she could find Tenko and Kirumi’s bodies...she didn’t even want to give Korekiyo a chance. How can someone who has presented themselves as nothing but shy and innocent want someone dead so much?

He watched her today as he was playing tennis. Whilst he didn’t hear anything she said, there was something about her expression that caused his gut to scream at him.

Something isn’t adding up.

He’s starting to get a headache as he realises that things can’t possibly get any more chaotic right

now. On one side of the school he's got Miu screaming bloody murder at Kokichi, who is clearly having some sort of breakdown. Then he's also got Kaito, who looks like he's literally seconds away from dropping dead on the floor and Tsumugi, who he just doesn't like.

Ryoma wishes Tenko was here. God, *why* did Korekiyo have to kill her along with Kirumi? If both girls were here right now then they'd know what to do.

He hears Miu scream again and grits his teeth.

"Hoshi, you need to stop her before she gets herself killed," Tsumugi tells him. "Don't worry about Momota, I'll look after him."

Ryoma looks at her silently before jabbing a candy cigarette at her. "Take him to the hangar bathroom to clean him up since it's close by. Once you're done, take him straight to his bedroom. Got it?"

Kaito mumbles something about hating the hangar but Tsumugi is walking him towards it before he can complain even more. Ryoma watches them both quietly before noticing the small blood trail that is following Kaito like a bad omen.

If his gut was screaming at him earlier then it's practically trying to deafen him now. Ryoma pauses before heading towards the direction Miu and Kokichi went in.

This group still has a ways to go.

Chapter End Notes

Unlocked new protagonist!

Encore - Part 1

Chapter Notes

Aaaaa I think this has been the first time I've ever been super nervous to post a chapter ahaha. I had to rewrite so many scenes several times and I'm hoping everything is okay. Thank you so much for the comments during the previous chapter! They really do mean a lot!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

Have a nice day!

Making sure Miu doesn't actually choke Kokichi to death is his first priority.

Ryoma sighs as he realises the classroom he's poked his head into is empty. He's never explored the school during the early hours of the morning before. It's eerily quiet so he thinks Miu has moved on from screaming to saving her breath. It's a shame, her yelling would've given him a hint as to where she could be right now.

A couple of specs of dust catch his eye as he moves onto a different room, hands nervously pressed deep into his pockets. There's moonlight trickling through the barred windows, causing each room and hallway to glow almost mysteriously. He can't help but think that this school is *more* than odd. How long has this place been abandoned for for there to be vines growing up the walls and weeds poking through the cracks of the floor?

Well, it's only the bottom floors that look so peculiar anyway. The new floors Monokuma added after people had died look much more tidy and presentable. It's an absolute mystery as to how those floors were built so quickly in the first place. Well, it would be a waste of time to dwell on such things for too long. If he hasn't figured out how Monokuma is able to do such feats by now then he probably never will.

He stands in the middle of an empty hallway and pauses, hoping that he might hear a footstep or something. *Anything* would be nice to help him figure out where Miu or Kokichi might be.

Ryoma's concerned, which is not like him. He never thought he'd be concerned about someone ever again. He's concerned that Miu is going to go too far in her attempt for revenge and he's concerned that Kokichi is too far gone to listen to reason.

Why did Kokichi tell everyone he's Monokuma's partner? It...it just doesn't sit right with him. Ryoma bites down on the inside of his mouth as he slowly patrols the hallway. All he can hear is the sound of his own dull footsteps.

Ryoma's seen the look of desperation before. Sometimes when a new inmate is brought in, they throw themselves against the cell bars and beg to be released. Some of them scream about how they're innocent, some of them just don't want to be trapped in the same box room for years and years. They all have the same swirly look in their eyes, like they're seconds away from being consumed by raw madness.

Kokichi had the same look in his eyes as he spewed confession after confession outside. However, Ryoma can't help but think there was something odd about why he chose to tell the so-called truth at that specific point. If he really is Monokuma's partner then why is he revealing himself now? There's still five of them left, wouldn't he want to wait until the last possible second to disclose such a thing?

Yeah, something really isn't adding up.

What happened to the kid who teased him during training? Ryoma can't lie, it was rather refreshing to have someone like Kokichi a part of the training group. Whilst it was nice of people like Kaito and Tenko to treat him like he wasn't a criminal, he couldn't help but be somewhat exasperated by their naïve approach of dealing with him. All they had known about him when everyone had first woken up here was that he was a mass murderer who took down an entire mafia. Any person with common sense would've been a bit more wary of him. So when Kokichi had easily been open from the start about how he was wary of Ryoma because of his past, he couldn't help but think thank god, there's at least *one* person around here who is capable of using their brain.

Then, something happened that caught Ryoma off guard. Kaito had invited him, Tenko and Kokichi out to train. His initial thoughts were, oh, this is *absolutely* going to end in disaster. He was somewhat right but he severely underestimated all three of them.

Tenko had been excited to train with him despite the fact he was a male. She had told him that it would be cool to exercise with someone athletic. Even when he had told her he was no longer the Ultimate Tennis Pro, all she had done was ask him if he still knew how to warm up properly before a game. He said yes and they exercised together. Despite the fact he thought it was extremely bizarre that she was open to exercising with him (a criminal with a stained past) he can't deny that it was...a pleasant experience.

Kaito, the ringleader of their little group, took him by surprise too. He had been mildly miffed during the start of the game that Kaito had been hell bent on Ryoma not being allowed to sacrifice himself for the group so early on. Back then, Ryoma never even dared to hope that he'd one day meet people who would want to care about him. Why would someone want to be friends with someone as tarnished as him? Cue Kaito, who all but bulldozed down all his defences with a smile. Even if Ryoma had initially wanted to swat away the hand Kaito held out for him, he took it in the end.

Kokichi definitely presented himself as the wildcard of the group right away. He had been unable to actually train and had been annoyed when Kaito found a way to work around that with a puzzle. Kokichi has always been tricky to figure out, joking around one minute and being deadly serious the next. Despite the whiplash he has caused him, Ryoma can't help but think that Kokichi reminds him of a mischievous younger brother who tells such outrageous lies for attention.

Somehow, such a random group of people managed to work very well together. One night whilst Ryoma had been lying in his bed, everything sort of just clicked and his eyes had snapped open as he realised oh, he's got people he cares about now. He's found people to care about in the middle of a killing game.

He supposes it was wishful thinking to hope that all of them would leave together. Kaito's belief that everyone will get out of here ended up being a little too infectious. When Ryoma fell down the rabbit hole of trying to figure out what happened to Kokichi on the same night Kiibo died, he ended up jumping to a conclusion he didn't particularly like. When he found Kokichi's torn up instruction in the bin, it didn't take him long to realise that maybe he wasn't the only one who wanted to

protect their little training group.

Ryoma knew he had all but hit the bullseye when Kokichi angrily argued with him about breaking the wall down as soon as possible. Truth be told, the way the kid acted reminded Ryoma of himself during the early days of the game and it was such a sad eye opener. He realised as he followed Kokichi up the stairs to his lab that this is what Kaito must've felt like when he offered himself up. God, looking back on it now he understands why Kaito had been so furious.

See, Ryoma knows he's a selfish person at heart. He killed an entire mafia because he thought that was the only way to avenge his family. He tainted the tennis world for revenge.

He knows deep down he'd do almost anything for his new found group of friends.

It turns out Kokichi wasn't the person he should've been worried about the most. Hearing Kaito slam on the middle door in the hallway, screaming for Korekiyo to open the door so he could see if Tenko was okay...it was soul destroying. Whilst Tenko never told Ryoma why she didn't seem to mind his criminal past, she accepted him and that's more than he could've ever asked for. She had been his friend and, well, excuse him for being such a sap but it warms his chest to think that after losing so much, he still managed to end up meeting such a caring person.

Tenko certainly had been the glue that held the group together. She was the one who invited him to train again. She was the one who told Kokichi to make up with Kaito. No wonder Korekiyo thought she would make such a good friend, she *had* been a good friend.

He wonders what she would be thinking right now if she was still alive. Would she have believed Kokichi? He's not sure. Tenko had always been an emotional person. Hearing one of her friends confess to such horrible crimes...she probably would've been devastated.

Ryoma tugs on his hat with a grimace as he realises that the floor of the school he's on is most likely empty. Sheesh, he should be more thorough with his searching though. He doesn't have time to daydream about...the dead.

He should've known the likelihood of everyone in the training group leaving this game together was slim. He just...kind of hoped that life was done taking people away from him. Apparently not.

Then there's Kirumi too. He guiltily averts his gaze to the side as he realises he hasn't really given her much thought. Maybe he's still in denial that both she and Tenko are dead. Korekiyo too. He truthfully didn't expect three people to die in one day. However, since Tsumugi told everyone what Korekiyo's instruction was, he supposes the number of deaths today could've been even higher.

Monokuma definitely knew what he was doing when he handed the bangles out. He knew he was going to get at least one murder out of this motive. Tch.

Just what is Monokuma getting out of this? How can he find torturing people in such a sadistic way so fun? It's inhumane. What pisses Ryoma off even more is how Monokuma thinks he's above the law. Prison might've been hell but at least he was never forced to play games like this.

He turns another corner and almost jumps when he bumps into Miu. The inventor shrieks when she spots him and almost lunges before realising he's not the person she's looking for. She huffs loudly and tries to push past him, growling when he blocks her path.

"I'm not in the fucking mood for this," Miu hisses as she tries to step past him for a second time.

"Truma, I've been looking for you everywhere," Ryoma says, effectively blocking her path again by standing directly in the middle of it. "What do you think you're doing?"

“What the fuck do you mean by that?!” Miu stares at him as if he’s gone crazy. “Someone has to teach that dickhead a lesson. You heard what Ouma said, right?! He basically confessed to killing Kiibo!”

“Iruma, calm down for just a second,” Ryoma responds, sighing when Miu tries to push him away with her leg. “You’re going to do something you’ll regret if you don’t take a step back and take a deep breath. You’re angry, I get it but-”

“Don’t talk as if you know me!” Miu hisses. “You don’t know a fucking thing about me and you never gave a shit about Kiibo whilst he was alive so fuck off so *someone* around here can avenge him!”

“Just because I wasn’t as close to Kiibo as you were doesn’t mean I’m not upset that he died, Iruma,” Ryoma says. He narrows his eyes as Miu starts to snarl. “I understand that you’re angry but you’re going to get yourself killed if you continue acting the way you’re acting. Do you think Kiibo would want that?”

“Don’t you *dare* use him against me,” Miu snaps. “You don’t fucking get it. How can you expect me to just let Ouma get away with killing Kiibo? If he says Monokuma isn’t going to punish him then I’ll do it my fucking self.”

“Do you really think you’re going to feel better if you do punish him?” Ryoma suddenly asks. He clenches his fists inside of his pockets. “Do you think this is what you really want?”

“What the fuck do you know about wanting revenge-” Miu stills before clicking her tongue with a huff. Clearly she’s just remembered about his past. She looks mildly uncomfortable before puffing out her chest. “I don’t have to waste my time explaining myself to you. Get outta the way before I make you move.”

Ryoma knows the trump card he holds over her is of course a sad one to have in the first place but he knows if he doesn’t talk her down now then he doesn’t know when his next chance to do so will be. “Iruma, do you think you’re the sort of person who will be able to live the rest of your life with blood on your hands? Taking matters into your own hands might seem appealing now, I get it. But take it from someone who actually went through with their desire for revenge, killing Ouma isn’t going to make you feel better.”

“J-Just because you turned into a depressed saddo doesn’t mean I will too,” Miu mutters. “Don’t be such a fucking hypocrite. Why do you get to have your revenge but not me? I know what I’m doing, dipshit.”

“Iruma, I really don’t think you do.” He notices that she’s trying to hide her shaking hands from him by shoving them into her armpits. Her refusal to look him in the eye is also a dead giveaway that she’s nervous. “If you kill him then he’s going to be the last thing you see every night before you fall asleep and the first thing you also see when you wake up. I know he said a lot of messed up things earlier but...just take a step back and think for just a moment. Do you actually think he’s telling the truth?”

“*Hah?*” Miu turns to look at him with a confused look in her eyes. “You think...that he’s *lying*? You did see what the rest of us saw, right? Ouma completely lost his shit outside. You want me to believe that he’s just fucking with us for shits and giggles?” She crosses her arms. “You’re only trying to defend him because you’re both friends with each other.”

Ryoma sighs. “So do you wholeheartedly believe that he killed Kiibo then?”

"I..." His question catches her off guard. Miu sniffs. "W-Well he confessed to killing him so..."

"You don't sound very confident if I'm being honest," Ryoma says. "Just because he confessed doesn't mean he hurt Kiibo."

"It's pretty fucked up to lie about something so serious," Miu grumbles. Ryoma grimaces at her point. "Besides, if he didn't kill Kiibo then who did? I'm never going to accept that Kiibo's death was an accident and I know Ouma knows what happened to him-"

"I'm not saying that I don't think Ouma knows what happened to him," Ryoma tells her. "In fact, I agree with you. I *do* think he saw what happened to Kiibo. But Iruma, you saw how he was during Kiibo's trial. Is it that far-fetched to think that maybe both Ouma and Kiibo were attacked on the same night, potentially at the same time?"

"He said Kiibo tried to restrain him," Miu retorts. "With the state Ouma ended up in, I bet Kiibo had to fight against him real hard. Tch, you're just trying to play mind games with me, aren't you?" She scowls at him. "Or maybe you've known about Ouma being Monokuma's partner from the start and you're helping him. That's why you're trying to stop me!"

"No, Iruma," Ryoma says as he pinches the bridge of his nose with a suffering sigh, "you're wrong. Ouma might've told us that the game is over but unless Monokuma confirms it himself that we're no longer playing, if you kill Ouma then you'll be killing yourself. Are you sure that's what you want?"

"I..." Miu sniffs again and tightly curls a strand of her curly hair around her finger. She swallows before looking at the set of stairs they're both standing near. "I just want Kiibo back."

Her miserable confession causes Ryoma's shoulders to slump with relief. Okay, it seems that this conversation is finally turning a corner. He gestures for her to follow him as he leads them to a patch of floor that isn't completely overrun by weeds and sits down, pressing his back against the wall. Miu blinks at him before slowly sitting down next to him, pulling her knees firmly to her chest.

"Didn't know you and Kiibo were that close," Ryoma admits quietly. He quietly offers Miu a candy cigarette and she takes one silently, holding it between her fingers with a vacant look on her face.

"Yeah, well..." Miu furiously rubs at her eyes her sleeve. "I've been told I can, you know, get a little intense sometimes. Been told a few fucking times I get attached far too quickly. But Kiibo, he told me he liked hanging out with me and he's the first ever person who..." Miu snaps the sweet in half, creating a chalky mess on the floor. "He just treated me like I was a human and didn't expect anything in return. How could I not end up falling for..."

Her face turns red. Ryoma kindly looks the other way. "Oh."

"D-Don't assume I'm desperate just because I ended up having a bit of a crush on him," Miu murmurs into her legs. "But when someone like him comes around, you always gotta act fast before he gets snatched up." Her tone turns bitter. "Or, you know, before he ends up fucking dying."

"You never got the chance to tell him how you felt, did you?"

"That motherfucking piece of shit bear wouldn't let me fix him when I wanted to," Miu grumbles, tightening her hold on her legs. "I-I bet if I was allowed to take Kiibo to my lab then I could've

fixed him or something. I could've at least tried to download his AI so I could've put it into another body. But *no*, Monokuma had to be a humongous prick and made a big deal about how fixing him would be cheating and unfair to everyone else that had already died."

It's understandable why she's so frustrated. Miu could've done something to help Kiibo but she was denied that chance. Ryoma scarcely remembers how she had wandered around the academy like a ghost for an entire week after Kiibo's death. All that time she had been grieving...he should've tried to comfort her. He should've done something.

"Kiibo deserves some sort of justice," Miu mutters darkly. "It's absolute BS that Monokuma thinks he can trick us into thinking he just fell down the stairs. I refuse to accept that. My golden brain can't be fooled so easily."

"There are other ways to get justice than to kill the person responsible for his death though," Ryoma says. He feels her shoulder's bristle. "It's been years since I killed the mafia responsible for my family's death...and my girlfriend's death too. But you know what? I still feel hollow. I thought getting rid of them would've made me feel just even a tiny bit better but honestly, I just ended up feeling worse. Got a lifetime prison sentence on top of that too. Actions have consequences, Iruma."

She goes quiet, as if thinking about something intensely, before lifting her head up from her knees. "I'm not...entirely braindead, you know? The world needs my genius golden brain and golden looks, after all. I just..." She grasps the air in front of her with gritted teeth. "Ugh, I want to teach the little brat a lesson so bad. He can't just drop a confession on us all like he did and expect us to accept it right away."

"Iruma, I don't think you're going to like what I'm about to say but hear me out for a second," Ryoma responds, ignoring the stink eye Miu sends his way. "Do you actually really think Ouma has been working with Monokuma this entire time?"

Miu frowns. "He literally told us that-"

"Iruma, I don't care what he said. I care about what *you* think," Ryoma says. "Ouma can say whatever he wants but if he's just telling another lie, doesn't that change everything?"

"It's only going to change the ass I'll be kicking," Miu mutters. "When the fuck did you become the president of the Ouma fanclub anyway? Why do you even want to try and defend him? Even if it turns out he is just lying, what sort of sick person picks to lie about helping to run a damn killing game?"

"Someone who has been pushed too far," Ryoma firmly answers. "I'm not saying that him lying about such a thing is okay. Believe me, even though I want nothing more than for him to be lying at the moment, of course I'm angry that he decided to drop such a bombshell on us all so soon after Tojo and Chabashira's murders. I'm not sure what his opinion on Tojo was but I know for a fact he got on with Chabashira. It's..." Ryoma sighs. "Very odd that he decided to confess to being Monokuma's partner when he did."

"He had some nerve telling us the game was over when he did," Miu mutters. "Prick just probably didn't want to get punished for killing so many people. Bet Monokuma decided that he'd only save his ass so many times before making him face the consequences of his actions. That's why Ouma decided to stop the game now."

"If he is working with Monokuma," Ryoma says, "don't you think it's peculiar that he decided to end the game now though? There's only five of us left. Ending the game now really does seem

counterproductive from the perspective of someone who is helping run it.”

“Ouma always goes on about how he doesn’t like boring things. If he says he’s bored then it doesn’t surprise me he’d just cancel an entire game just to find something else better to do,” Miu huffs.

“Is that what you really think?” Ryoma asks.

Miu casts her eyes down onto the floor before tearing out a chunk of nearby grass with a gloved hand. “It’s what makes sense. I mean, I always thought the fucker was weird but him admitting he’s basically the mastermind of this entire game did surprise me. Guess you can never judge a book by its cover nowadays.”

It seems her anger has simmered down to something more bitter. “Truma, I’m gonna be honest with you. I…” Ryoma takes a deep breath before letting it out. “I don’t think he was telling the truth earlier. I’m really, *really* concerned about him, especially regarding his mental health.”

Miu looks at him incredulously. “He literally just confessed-”

“I know he did,” Ryoma says. “And I think he was telling the truth about some things. I do think Kiibo’s death wasn’t just an accident. I do think there was something completely off about Gonta’s trial. I do think that there’s someone here working with Monokuma. I just don’t think that person is Ouma.”

Miu scrunches her nose up at him as she says, “well who the fuck do you think is working with Monokuma then?”

“I’ve got a hunch,” Ryoma admits. “But with the look on your face, I’ve got a feeling you don’t really believe anything I’m saying right now.”

“Because honestly? Your opinion on this matter is always going to be biased as fuck,” Miu says. “You’re a part of Momota’s weird ass friendship cult so obviously you’re all going to look out for each other.”

Ryoma grimaces as he nibbles on the end of his candy cigarette. She has a point. She hasn’t spent as much time with Kokichi as he has. She doesn’t have any reason to think that he’s lying and he certainly did an excellent job of making himself sound guilty as hell.

“He shouldn’t be allowed to get away with all this,” Miu says, hardening her gaze. “And, okay, yeah, maybe I shouldn’t be the one to kill him but with how much shit he’s gotten away with, do you really think he deserves to leave this game alive?”

“I think,” Ryoma says as he looks up at her with his own tough look in his eyes, “solving a problem with murder is the wrong choice. The mastermind deserves to be punished but they certainly shouldn’t be killed for their crimes. Asking Monokuma for a trial is the same as asking him to kill someone. You won’t be killing the mastermind directly but you’ll live the rest of your life knowing you stooped down to their level.”

Miu clicks her tongue. “So you just want to let Ouma, well, the mastermind, get away with everything?”

Ryoma pauses before shaking his head. “Honestly, I just want to know what’s actually going on and the only person who might have a clue is Ouma and, well, there’s obviously a slight issue with asking him for help at the moment.”

Miu narrows her eyes as she says, “you really don’t think he’s actually the mastermind, do you?”

“I’ve certainly got my doubts,” Ryoma agrees. “But at the same time, well, if there was a way to completely know for sure then that would be helpful.”

“There’s always...” Miu hesitates before shaking her head. “Nah, never mind.”

“Iruma?”

She chews her bottom lip. “...remember the lie detector I made?”

Yes, yes he *does*. “Iruma, if the lie detector says he’s been lying about all of this then would you trust it?”

“I-I mean, duh.” Miu licks her lips. “But I don’t know where the fuck Ouma went. One minute I was right behind him then I turned a corner and he was gone! Wouldn’t have wanted to play hide and seek with him as a kid, that’s for sure.”

She seems hesitant. He can’t blame her. She has so much anger and bitterness directed towards Kokichi and he’s defending him. As far as she’s concerned, he’s defending Kiibo’s killer. It’s a wonder why she hasn’t decided to deck him yet.

Something about the way she’s distantly staring at the wall in front of her, eyes glazed over with a faraway expression reminds him of himself a couple of years ago. He had no one around to stop him from doing stupid. Usually he’d just keep his head down and mind his own business but he can’t afford to do that right now. Miu’s starting to walk down the same dark path he trudged down. What sort of person would he be letting her make the same mistakes he did?

He’s starting to get a really bad headache.

“...by the way,” Miu mumbles. “I didn’t, um, you know, know you had a girlfriend. How long did it take for you to...accept that she’s dead?”

“Honestly?” Ryoma closes his eyes. “Don’t think I ever did.”

“Oh.” The inventor wrings her hands together by her legs as she frowns softly.

“The pain doesn’t hurt as bad after a while though,” Ryoma says. “And maybe one day you might wake up and the pain will be gone completely. I...don’t think I’ve got the answers you’re particularly looking for, Iruma. Don’t think there really is a real answer in the first place.”

Miu hums before snorting humourlessly. “Everything fucking sucks.”

She’s not wrong.

She sniffs as she dabs at her eyes with the sleeve of her shirt. “Not crying by the way, my eyes are just really sweaty at the moment. Y’know, from all that running I did earlier.”

“Sure, sure, whatever you say.” Ryoma tilts his head. “You feeling better now though?”

“I,” Miu groans before pressing her palms against her eyes, “just wish I had an invention that could restart this entire day from scratch. No, this entire game from scratch.”

“Would be handy,” Ryoma agrees with a bittersweet smile, copying Miu as she stands up slowly. He looks up at her face and awkwardly looks away. “Uh, you kinda got mascara all over your face from where you’ve been rubbing it.”

“Well shit.” Miu starts to rub her cheeks firmly with her uniform sleeve, clicking her tongue when it doesn’t help. “Be right back, just going to go to the bathroom and sort my face out so I don’t look like a complete tool.”

With how she continuously rubs her face as she walks away from him, he doesn’t think she’s trying to escape. He follows slowly after her so he can meet her outside the bathrooms, walking slowly enough so that he doesn’t have to stand around awkwardly. He hears her go inside and takes his time heading down the stairs when the bathroom door opens up again noisily and Miu walks back out looking pale. Ryoma quickly decides to up his pace.

“Truma, what’s wrong?”

She grabs his wrist, her eyes wide with anxiety as she says, “Hoshi, I swear I just heard someone fucking screaming.” She drags him into the girl’s bathroom and puts a finger to her lips. He pauses and then frowns when he hears a muffled yell.

“What are you doing?! Y-You’re going to break me at this rate!”

There’s another scream of anguish and Ryoma cannot for the life of him figure out who the voice belongs too. He hears a distant crash and he and Miu look at each other at the same time before she looks past him and points at the wall.

“Holy shit, look! The damn wall is a door!” Miu starts to tremble.

Ryoma raises an eyebrow as he looks to where she’s pointing, raising his brow even higher as he notices the wall is somehow open a slight crack. Miu helplessly follows him as he grabs the wall and pushes it open even further, his eyes going wide as a dark hallway is revealed.

“Stop hitting me! I-I’m being serious! I-I’ll electrocute you!”

A loud crash echoes up the hallway and Ryoma swallows before stepping inside, quirkling an eyebrow when Miu suddenly grabs his shoulder.

“You’re seriously not going down there, are you?” Miu hisses. “Do you see all the dried blood everywhere?! H-Has this been here the whole time?!”

“Most likely,” Ryoma responds, shrugging her hands from his shoulder. “And shouldn’t we figure out who is screaming?”

Miu starts to squirm. “Look how fucking ominous the hallway looks. If we were in a horror film then this is the part where the killer comes running up to stab us to death-” Miu suddenly starts to scream, grabbing both of his shoulders this time as she tries to hide herself behind him.

Ryoma’s entire body tenses as he spots what Miu must’ve seen. A large shadow is starting to grow at the end of the hallway. Someone must be walking up it. He takes a step back, narrowing his eyes as he realises the screaming has finally stopped. All he can hear now is what sounds like metal being dragged across the ground.

“Stay behind me,” he tells Miu, who starts to nod frantically.

“Don’t have to fucking tell me twice!”

Ryoma must admit that he is surprised when Kokichi appears from around the corner, head down as he drags a metal pipe behind him. God knows where he found said pipe from but clearly the kid hasn’t figured out that he and Miu are at the end of the hallway. He feels Miu’s grip on his

shoulders tighten, her fingernails digging in sharply into his leather jacket as Kokichi finally steps into the bathroom.

Kokichi looks at them both but it honestly doesn't feel like he's actually looking *at* them, more so looking through them. It makes Ryoma feel like a ghost. Ryoma holds his breath whilst he hears Miu swallow loudly. Even Ryoma must admit that he's somewhat intimidated by the metal pipe in the kid's hands. There's a couple of scratches on Kokichi's face, which looks somewhat flushed.

There's a long pause before Kokichi looks away and leaves the bathroom, dragging the metal pipe along with him.

"What the *fuck*." Miu lets out a loud breath as her grip on him thankfully loosens. "Hoshi, what the fuck was that?"

"I really don't know," Ryoma admits.

Miu clearly is the sort of person who has more bark than bite. If the situation was any different, he would've found it amusing how she didn't jump down Kokichi's throat straight away and instead cowered away from him since he had a pipe in his hands. However, even Ryoma froze. It just felt like if someone moved or said the wrong thing, all hell would've broken loose.

"S-So Ouma...already knew about this passageway?" Miu stammers as she peers down it again. "That's..."

It really, really doesn't make Kokichi look good at all. Ryoma steels himself. "Let's not jump to any conclusions. I know it looks scary but we need to see what is at the end of the hallway."

Miu swears nervously under her breath but does follow him closely as Ryoma leads the way down, wrapping her arms tightly around herself as the sound of her heels echo up and down the bloody halls.

Ryoma fails from letting his jaw hang open as he reaches the end of the hall and steps into a room he's never seen before. All of the lavish furniture doesn't really catch his attention since the first thing he notices is what seems to be a large smashed up...Monokuma head? There are black and white pieces all over the floor. A strand of exposed wire sparks sporadically as he circles the head with a baffled expression.

"What the..." Miu stands in front of the beaten head with a pinched expression. "Is...this what had been screaming before?"

"Must've been," Ryoma answers uncertainly. "It looks like a...huge Monokuma head."

"D-Didn't Monokuma say at the start of the game that there was some sort of Monokuma making machine? You know, when he told us if a murder didn't occur in twelve hours he said he would use some machine to clone himself so he could tear us all into pieces," Miu murmurs. "This...has to be the machine, right?"

"And it looks like Ouma broke it," Ryoma realises quietly.

Miu frowns. "Why would he..."

"He must want Monokuma out of the picture," Ryoma says.

Miu stares at him incredulously. "B-But they're partners, right? Why would he want his partner out of the picture?"

Ryoma shakes his head. "Truma, I really don't think this is a case of two partners having a disagreement over something."

She doesn't respond to him. He can practically hear the cogs in her brain turning as she tries to think of a reasonable response. When she takes too long to say something, Ryoma turns away from the broken head to look at the hallway they just came from.

"I really don't think he's okay," Ryoma says. "But clearly in the state he's in we're going to have a hard time to get him to actually cooperate with us. Still think getting the lie detector on him is the best way forward but..."

Miu tentatively pokes a part of the Monokuma head with the tip of her shoe, shuddering when it rolls away from her. "He'll probably bash our brains in if we go near him. He's absolutely insane."

"He's not insane," Ryoma corrects her with a grimace. "Just..."

"God, Momota really has rubbed off on you a lot and not in a fun way either," Miu says. "Ouma doesn't know how fucking lucky he is right now that he has you defending him. Still don't know why you're trying so hard to protect his ass..."

"I guess I just, you know, believe in him," Ryoma tells her earnestly.

Miu pauses before shaking her head. "You're weird, you know that? Never got why Momota gets such a hard on about believing in shit so strongly. I mean, you'd think Monokuma would've made his instruction to make it so he wasn't allowed to be so full on with screaming about his belief in every little fucking thing every second of the day."

Ryoma frowns. "That...*was* his instruction."

Miu frowns back at him. "Hah? Space case was literally full on foaming at the mouth about how he believed in the letters we got about breaking down the wall. Hoshi, you were literally fucking there."

Yes. Yes he was. Ryoma puts a hand to his forehead as he stares blankly at the floor, trying to figure out how he somehow managed to overlook such an *obvious* thing. Hearing Kaito say he believes in everyone and everything is something he's so used to by now that he must've not made the connection during breakfast. If Kaito had suddenly died on the spot for failing to follow his instruction then yes, he probably would've made the link but, shit, he had been so preoccupied with suspecting the letter and had so many thoughts bouncing around his head that...

Great. Now he has to add scolding Kaito to his never ending list of things to do. If the astronaut thinks he's going to get away with this then he's sorely mistaken.

"Good grief," Ryoma mutters, carefully massaging his forehead with his thumb and finger. "I'm surrounded by idiots."

Miu starts to splutter. "W-What?! Fucking *rude*-"

"Not you," Ryoma sighs. "Just...never mind."

Miu scoffs at him, crossing her arms. "Whatever. If you had been referring to me then I would've gotten all of my loyal fans to teach you a lesson."

"Okay, whatever you say."

He sees her puff her cheeks out from the corner of his eye. "Tch, asshole."

Ryoma tugs on his hat with a heavy sigh. "Anyway, shouldn't we be focussing more on trying to figure out how to get the lie detector on Ouma? Don't think the kid is just going to put it on willingly and it's going to be a pain to get him to keep it on too."

"Why do you always call him kid?" Miu suddenly asks. "We're all similar ages, right? Is it because he's small?"

Ryoma looks at her dryly. "He just...reminds me of a kid in some ways. Kid. Kid brother. You know."

"I think I'd rather die than have Ouma as my brother," Miu says with a shudder. "Imagine having to tell people you're related to him. People will probably give me money just so I can get therapy for the trauma of simply sharing the same last name."

"We're getting off topic," Ryoma sighs. "We need to think of a way to put the lie detector on him."

"We can just...hold him down and make him wear it," Miu suggests slowly, squirming when Ryoma shoots her a withering glare. "W-Why are you looking at me like that? Do you seriously think we have the luxury of asking him to put it on? Besides, he's being an absolute dick right now. If he's not going to be nice to us then I'm not being nice to him. I'm only going along with this since you literally won't shut the fuck up about believing in him."

Miu is making a frustratingly good point. It might be inhumane but...

"Don't feel comfortable with forcing him to wear the lie detector on but it's for his own good," Ryoma murmurs. "Iruma, you promise that you're not going to take back what you said about trusting your lie detector?"

"I know without a doubt it works fine!" Miu clicks her tongue. "Because obviously Kiibs knew about how breaking the wall would end the game and it buzzed for him. Ouma too." Miu suddenly frowns. "Hold on..."

"It buzzed for Shirogane too." Ryoma scrunches his nose up. "Makes you wonder how she knew how to end the game too so early on."

Miu finally allows a flicker of doubt to show on her face. "Huh...is she...the person you suspect is working with Monokuma?"

Ryoma nods firmly. "That's right."

The inventor wrings her hands nervously. "Didn't think plain Jane would be capable of..." Miu trails off as she looks around the room quietly. Ryoma can tell from how her eyes start to go unfocussed that she's in deep thought. "What happens if the lie detector, you know, says Ouma is telling the truth? He...He did say he basically bullied Shirogane into submission."

"If that happens then..." Ryoma hesitates before tugging on his hat uncomfortably. "Actually, I'm just really sort of hoping that'll not happen. Already lost one close friend today and I really don't want to lose another."

Which is why he wants Kokichi to confess to the actual truth sooner rather than later. Leaving Kaito with Tsumugi was a big enough risk in itself. He thinks like himself, Kaito also must've not entirely thought Kokichi was telling the truth either. Ryoma isn't sure what Kaito knows but he seemed all too happy to act like he wholeheartedly believed in Kokichi's lies in front of Tsumugi.

Kaito also wanted him to play along too, well, that's what he's hoping Kaito's subtle nod to him meant anyway.

Miu looks unusually serious as she puts a hand on her hip with a huff. "Tch, wish someone would just explain what's going on. I can't keep up with all this cryptic BS. Ouma better have a good explanation for all of this if he is lying."

"Hopefully he will," Ryoma says and keeps his fingers crossed as they leave the hidden room together.

—

They watch as Kokichi enters the dormitory and set a plan into motion.

Ryoma sits on the steps outside of the dormitory with a bucket of tennis balls by his side and a racket resting on his lap. Across from him is Miu, who is crouching behind a bush with her lie detector clutched tightly in her hand. As Ryoma examines his racket quietly, he reminds himself that sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind. He hates that it's come to this but if this is what it takes to drag Kokichi from the deep end then he'll do what he has to.

He tenses as he hears the dormitory door open behind him and he's vaguely aware that Kokichi pauses before walking past him without a care in the world. He lets him take a couple of steps before saying, "where do you think you're going?"

"Hm?" Kokichi turns his head around, wearing a very disinterested look on his face. He eyes the bucket of tennis balls and then the racket with a blank expression. "Oh? Have you come to kill me? That's awfully brutal of you."

The tennis player narrows his eyes as Kokichi starts to walk away from him again. He steadies his breathing as he grabs a ball and whacks it near Kokichi's feet as a warning. "Ouma, we need to talk."

"Um, no we don't." Kokichi kicks the tennis ball away.

"Yes," Ryoma says as he steels himself, "*we do.*"

"Ah, then perhaps I should rephrase what I just said," Kokichi responds, crossing his arms with a huff as he turns around to face the tennis player properly. "I don't want to talk to you. Go find someone else to bother."

Kokichi smiles softly and it fills Ryoma with unease. From this angle he can see that there's something continuously brewing behind the leader's eyes, something swirling and drowning out all the light. "Tough shit, Ouma. We're going to talk and that's final."

"What are you going to do if I walk away, hmm? Kill me?" Kokichi doesn't even seem phased by his own words. "Are you going to kill me even though the game is over? Wow, you *really* must hate me."

"If you're the mastermind then I'll deal with you accordingly," Ryoma tells him and hopes to anyone that is listening that the kid doesn't pick up on his bluff. He readies another tennis ball in his hand.

Kokichi pouts. "Hah? But I just told everyone that I'm Monokuma's partner. What? Do you not believe me?" He kicks at the floor with a slight huff. "Geez, you let Momota infect you too much with his stupidity. If you're still choosing to believe in me even now then you're a bigger idiot than

I thought you were.”

“I believe in innocent until proven guilty,” Ryoma responds. “And with your track record, I wouldn’t put it past you to lie about something so serious.” He looks up at Kokichi calmly. “So I’m giving you this one chance to tell me the actual truth before things get messy and trust me, I really rather do this the easy way rather than the hard way.”

“The actual truth?” Kokichi cocks his head to the side with a vacant expression before sneering. “Did you not hear a single thing I said before? This is my game,” he says with a crooked smile. “And I’ve enjoyed every single second of it. It’s just a shame you all got too boring for me. I’ve outgrown my need for this game so…”

Ryoma grimaces. So that’s how it’s going to be, huh? Kokichi has gone so far off the deep end that Ryoma isn’t even sure who exactly he’s dealing with right now. He’s standing right in front of him, Kokichi is standing right in front of him but right now it feels like he’s staring at a complete stranger, someone who has locked their former into the darkest parts of their mind.

Once upon a time Ryoma, the Ultimate Tennis Pro, lived a happy life. He had friends. He had a family. He had a girlfriend. He loved tennis and made a career out of it. One day, the Ultimate Tennis Pro went missing and the Ultimate Prisoner took his place, dragging his empty shell of a body around.

The key point from that story is the Ultimate Tennis Pro only went *missing*, he never died. He was found again by Kaito and was cared for by Tenko. Kokichi, whether knowingly or not, also slipped his way into Ryoma’s growing group of friends.

See, what people don’t expect from Ryoma is how greedy he can be. His friends are his and it doesn’t matter who or what tries to hurt them, he’s certainly not the type of person to sit back and wait for things to get worse.

Ryoma tightens his grip on his racket and looks down at it with a thoughtful expression. “Alright, so you clearly don’t want to play nice then.”

“Play nice? Are we playing a game, Hoshi-chan?” Kokichi asks him. “Oh dear, I wasn’t aware.”

Kokichi’s tone grates on his ears. He doesn’t think he’s heard someone speak with such childish malice before. If things were different, Ryoma thinks this scenario would be playing out so much differently. Maybe he wouldn’t be the one staring Kokichi down, maybe someone else with a lot less patience and less belief in him would be looking down at the leader with a weapon in hand. Maybe they’d shoot.

Perhaps it’s desperation that’s forcing him to keep his hands steady as Kokichi smugly looks at him, hands clasped behind his back a little too confidently. Maybe the leader knows he won’t actually hurt him. Maybe he does want Ryoma to hurt him, to kill him. It’s so hard to tell. Maybe Kokichi is so far gone that Ryoma is wasting his time trying to even reason with him, maybe he’s not listening to a word he’s saying.

With as spectacular a breakdown the kid had earlier, it’s pretty clear Kokichi has been sinking lower and lower for a very long time. Ryoma just hopes he’s still somewhere he can reach him, to grab his hand and pull.

“Kid, I don’t think you’re okay,” Ryoma says slowly. “And I’m more inclined to believe you’re lying about being the mastermind of this killing game. Maybe that’s down to me just wanting to believe in you-”

“Then you’re stupid,” Kokichi responds with a snort. “Very stupid.”

“Let me finish,” Ryoma snaps. “Whilst I do believe in you, I also believe in facts too. I believe in innocent until proven guilty. If you want to tell me that you’re the mastermind then I want to tell you why you can’t be. I’ve lost too many people and I’m not adding you to that list. So you’re going to stand there and you’re going to listen to me or I’m really going to lose my patience.”

“And what if I don’t want to listen?” Kokichi challenges.

A tennis ball lightly grazes against Kokichi’s cheek before rolling down the stone steps near the wisteria. “I’m not screwing around, Ouma. If you walk away then I’m only going to drag you right back.”

Kokichi raises an eyebrow before muffling a chuckle behind his hand. “Oh really?”

“Really.” Ryoma picks up another tennis ball from his bucket. “So, do you want to first explain why you helped Gonta stop me from doing something stupid in the warehouse at the start of the game? Rather kind of someone who claims they’re the mastermind.”

“Oh that? Easy. This killing game is about killing each other,” Kokichi says. “Not ourselves.”

“You do realise you helped save my life that day, right?” Ryoma tells him. “Wasn’t sure if you were just telling outrageous lies to keep me alive but if you hadn’t intervened then I wouldn’t be here right now. Never really thanked you for what you did, actually.”

He catches Miu frowning from behind the bush. He supposes for someone who didn’t know what he was up to in the warehouse that day, this conversation must sound incredibly concerning.

“Why would I want to be thanked? I only stopped you because you would’ve just ended up dying a boring death otherwise,” Kokichi responds with a smile.

Ryoma winces but steels himself. “Doesn’t matter what your motive was for stopping me, you still did. Thank you, kid.”

“Ugh, don’t start getting all mushy on me now,” Kokichi grumbles with a pout. “Emotions are so yucky. I think I’d rather ask you to bash my brain in with a tennis ball than have to talk about feelings.”

He picks to ignore him. “Oh yeah, didn’t you mention that this game was a...what was it again? Simulation?”

Kokichi blinks before nodding, rubbing his chin rather dramatically. “Ah, I do recall maybe saying that. But that was just a lie-”

“Nah, think there was some truth in that claim,” Ryoma says. “After all, if we are in a simulation then you would’ve just turned this game off instead of whatever you’re doing right now. If you’re truly Monokuma’s partner then you would have access to switching the game off right away, or am I being unreasonable?”

“I was totally on my way to do that now-”

“But whilst we’re on the topic of you being Monokuma’s partner,” Ryoma continues, “it’s rather strange as to why you broke some sort of giant Monokuma head in a hidden room? I think...that was the Monokuma making machine, right? The one Monokuma mentioned during the first motive? Rather peculiar that you broke it.”

Kokichi huffs as he shakes his fists. “Because I don’t need Monokuma anymore! I just want this game to be *my* game now so-”

“But isn’t the game finished?”

Kokichi’s smile twitches and Ryoma knows he’s finally starting to get under his skin. “Yes it *is* but-”

Ryoma’s been in enough courtrooms to know that whilst it isn’t exactly the most clean of tactics, cutting people off before they can finish can sometimes help out in the long run. The sooner he catches Kokichi out, the better. If that means speaking over him when he tries to argue then he’ll do so. “Get your story straight, Ouma. Is the game actually over or not?”

“It is,” Kokichi insists, sounding strangely firm. “So I’m finding it very cruel that Hoshi-chan is clearly trying to torture information out of me before he kills me!”

“I’m not,” Ryoma says. “The only thing I’m doing is proving that you’re not the mastermind-”

“I am the mastermind! I am, I am, I am!” Kokichi sings, reaching up to cover his ears.

Ryoma hits a ball so it carefully hits Kokichi’s hand. The leader pouts and still rubs it anyway, which causes Ryoma to roll his eyes. He knew how much power went behind that shot, there’s not even going to be a mark left behind on his hand. “Hey, focus. You still need to listen to me.”

“Hey, hey! Maybe instead of going over the reasons why I can’t be the mastermind, let’s instead go over the reasons why I *am*!” Kokichi suggests in a tone of voice that clearly indicates that he isn’t suggesting but ordering instead. “Let’s see-”

“I don’t think you’re brave enough to stab yourself,” Ryoma says. “I think you’re stupid enough to not let your wounds heal properly but I certainly don’t think you have the guts to stab yourself with a knife.”

“I am capable of many things,” Kokichi tells him with a pout. “So-”

“You were obviously attacked,” Ryoma says. “And I don’t think Angie hurt you in self defence. I don’t think Gonta stabbed you like Shirogane claimed and I don’t think you hurt yourself.”

“So what? The knife magically inserted itself into my gut?” Kokichi drawls.

“I think Shirogane stabbed you,” Ryoma responds and notices how Kokichi’s smile twitches for a second time.

“Shirogane? Hmm? A meek girl like her?” Kokichi muses, twisting his hands tightly behind his back. His shoulders have gone tense. “That’s a rather odd claim, Hoshi. A very odd claim. In fact, it actually makes no sense at all! Gonta was the one who-”

“Partners look out for partners, right?” Ryoma narrows his eyes as he hits the stone step he’s sitting on with the bottom of his racket. “No one was willing to kill anyone and since Monokuma couldn’t get involved, his partner had to do something. There only needed to be one body for the time limit to be dismissed so...I think Shirogane tried to kill you first, right?”

“Wrong.”

“And Angie ended up being at the wrong place at the wrong time,” Ryoma presses. “She saw Shirogane stab you and so Shirogane decided to kill her instead.”

“Your logic is *flaaawed!*” Kokichi tells him. “Why would little old me keep quiet about Angie and Gonta too-”

“Being stabbed is traumatising. Some people would rather not stand up to their attacker,” Ryoma says.

“Well aren’t you desperate to paint poor Shirogane in such a negative light,” Kokichi coos. “And you’re *wroooong*, by the way. Absolutely wrong, wrong, wrong! Nothing you’re saying makes any sense, it’s all unfathomable gibberish!”

The leader tries to walk away but once again, Ryoma aims a tennis ball at the ground by his feet. “I’m still not done yet. I want to talk about the mark on your wrist still. You know, the one you said was caused by Kiibo-”

“It was-”

“Nah, that doesn’t sit right with me,” Ryoma says sternly. It’s rather concerning that even now, Kokichi still would rather lie. Something akin to dread settles in Ryoma’s stomach. There’s still that tiny possibility that he’s wrong about Kokichi, that the leader is actually telling the truth. “I still think it’s more likely the two of you were attacked on the same night. That makes much more-”

“As if I’d be stupid enough to let myself be attacked!” Kokichi cackles at him. There’s an undeniable edge to his voice that makes Ryoma realise he’s about to enter a very tricky territory. Kokichi shakes his head, pressing his palms into his eyes. “You don’t know what you’re on about! You *don’t!* God, you might be even *worse* than Momota! Just shut up-”

“Okay, okay, we don’t have to talk about what happened that night just yet,” Ryoma offers. “That’s fine.”

“Don’t talk to me like I’m some...some scared child!” Kokichi hisses, turning away from him but continuing to hide his face with his hands. He chokes out a laugh. “What are you trying to accomplish?! The game is finished! I ended it! Go and find someone else to bother-”

“Not until I find out what’s actually going on,” Ryoma tells him. “Because this?” He gestures to Kokichi with his hand. “I don’t believe that you’re some malicious mastermind who wants us all dead. I think you’ve been pushed-”

“I-”

“-to breaking point. I’ve seen people crack under pressure before,” Ryoma says. “Ouma-”

“*Shut up!*” Kokichi screeches and Ryoma doesn’t hit another tennis ball at him this time when he covers his ears. He paces back and forth before biting down on his fist to stop a plethora of giggles from slipping out. “Stop talking! I don’t want to hear anything you say! I don’t! You’re ruining everything!”

A slip up.

“What am I ruining, Ouma?” Ryoma presses.

He’s not listening. Kokichi quickens his pace, eyes blown wide open and unfocussed as he bites down on his fist again. “No, shut up. *Shut up.* Stop talking.” Ryoma catches Miu poke her head up from the bush. “Things are going my way from now on, got it? *My way.* If one more thing goes wrong then...”

Miu looks as uncertain as he feels. Kokichi has gone back to giggling to himself, muttering something into his fist as he walks up and down the path outside the dormitory.

“He’s lost the plot, hasn’t he?” Miu hisses to him.

Ryoma shakes his head with a frown, gesturing for her to stay hidden. “Shh. He’s going to see you.”

“And? All I’m doing is sitting here like an idiot,” Miu retorts. “You’re not getting anywhere with him-”

“I was hoping he’d just confess on his own,” Ryoma tells her. He rubs his forehead. “Don’t think that’s happening anytime soon though.”

“He’s had his chance,” Miu loudly whispers back. “The moment he starts rambling on about whether he’s the mastermind or some shit, I’m putting the lie detector on him. He’s fucking deflecting *everything*.”

Ryoma clears his throat loudly as Kokichi snaps his head over in his direction, pausing his pacing to storm over to him. “You’re talking to someone. Who are you talking to?”

“Myself,” Ryoma says, nervously tapping the bottom of his racket on the floor as Kokichi stares at him disbelievingly.

“Liar!” Kokichi turns around, eyes narrowing as he scans the area. He scowls when Ryoma steals his attention by hitting another tennis ball by his feet. “Quit it-”

“Ouma, I’m only going to ask you this one last time,” Ryoma says as he hits another ball on the floor. “Tell me the truth. Are you actually the one masterminding this game?”

Kokichi scoffs before rolling his eyes heavily, his previous more giggly manic attitude melting into something much more impatient. “Are you actually *braindead*? Does nothing stick in your stupid head? How many times do I have to tell you?!” Kokichi puts a hand to his chest, letting out an irritated laugh. “I am the one who started this killing game. Me!”

He takes a step forward.

“This is *my* killing game.”

Another step.

“So get it through your thick skull-”

Step.

“-that there’s nothing you can say to convince me to say otherwise!” Kokichi looks down at him as if he was a piece of dirt on the bottom of his shoe. “Did you get all that? I am the mastermind behind this killing game!”

Buzz!

Everything goes from zero to one hundred in a matter of seconds. Kokichi starts to thrash like a wild animal as Miu wraps her arms around his shoulders, keeping a firm grip of the lie detector she’s somehow managed to slip on him. Kokichi screams, feral and almost panicked as he registers the buzz, legs kicking out as he struggles against the inventor’s hold.

Ryoma lets out a breath he didn't know he was holding as Miu continues to wrestle with Kokichi. Miu's expression is mostly hidden by her messy hair but he can tell she's desperate since she's refusing to let the small male go.

"You fucking *liar!*" Miu shrieks, stumbling when Kokichi kicks her leg. "Why the hell would you lie about such a fucked up thing?!"

"I'm not lying! I'm not!" Kokichi insists hysterically, choking back on something that sounds like a mixture of a sob and giggle when the lie detector buzzes again.

"What the fuck is your problem?!" Miu shakes him roughly, ignoring Ryoma's warning for her to let Kokichi go. "It's bad enough dealing with Monokuma's bullshit but yours too?! You insensitive prick!"

"Truma," Ryoma warns her. "Let him go!"

"I want to hear him say who killed Kiibo with his own god damn mouth," Miu hisses. "The little shitstain owes me that much at least! Fucker practically forced me to make something in an impossibly short amount of time in exchange of telling me what happened to Kiibo and he had the audacity to lie to face!"

"Who cares about Kiibo?!" Kokichi writhes violently in her hold. Ryoma notes with a worried frown that the kid's breathing has gone strange. "H-He's the inconsiderate one for dying! I didn't ask for him to follow me! He's the one who..." His elbow misses as he aims for Miu's stomach. "Everyone who has died so far, they're the ones who were stupid enough to allow themselves to be killed!"

"Even now you're still fucking around?!" Miu readjusts her grip. "How evil are you to be so inconsiderate?! You're the only bastard who thinks any of this is funny, you know?! You're the only one who is having fun at the moment!"

"How can a game that wasn't even supposed to happen be fun?"

The silence that follows Kokichi's question is deafening. Miu opens and closes her mouth before letting the small male go with a confused look on her face. Even Ryoma struggles to think of an appropriate response, his previous fleeting moment of relief quickly being smothered with worry.

Kokichi takes advantage of Miu finally letting him go to hide his face into his hands, his entire body trembling as he curls in on himself. Ryoma mentally scolds himself for letting himself think that just because the lie detector buzzed, that didn't mean Kokichi was finished spiralling. With how...how genuine he just sounded, how desperate...God, Ryoma doesn't even have the answer to the kid's question either.

Miu has hopefully realised that responding with a snarky remark is probably not the best choice and chooses to not answer. She does, however, bite her lip and turns to face Ryoma with an expression that screams 'what the hell do we do?'

Ryoma looks down at his racket before putting it down, knowing he isn't going to need it anymore. "Ouma, what do you mean by that? What do you mean this game wasn't supposed to happen?"

The kid's shoulders are shaking and he's smothering some sort of noise into his hands. It's hard to tell if he's laughing or crying. "We've all been screwed the moment we all woke up here. We never stood a chance. We never stood a chance at all."

Ryoma can barely make out Kokichi's eyes through the cracks of his fingers but from what he can

see, the manic swirling has slowed into something more forlorn, something that's being fuelled by grief. The tennis player hesitates before sighing as he struggles to find the right words. Kokichi isn't making any sense and he's not sure if this mournful silence is an improvement from earlier.

He knew backing Kokichi into a corner wasn't going to be easy, that getting him into the corner wasn't going to be simple. He was right to dread thinking about the aftermath too.

"What the hell do you mean?" Miu asks, sounding more perplexed than annoyed.

Kokichi only shakes his head and Ryoma finally figures out that he's humourlessly chuckling to himself.

"Ouma..." Ryoma's frown softens.

"What sort of person forces a game to happen when they know it's never going to work out properly?" Kokichi chokes out between helpless laughs. "And keeps the game going even when they shouldn't? H-How has she managed to keep such a straight face when she greeted everyone everyday, knowing she's forcing this game to happen? *How?*"

Ryoma guiltily tugs on his hat. Forcing the truth from Kokichi with the lie detector has all but stripped him of all his defences. He's got no more lies to hide behind, no more bravado left to flourish. This is a side of the leader he's never met before. He's the one who put him in this vulnerable state. It might've been Miu who placed the lie detector around Kokichi's neck but Ryoma also thought it was for the best too.

All he can do now is take responsibility for his own actions.

The tennis player can practically feel the despair that emanates from Kokichi. Just one look at the kid is enough to figure out that he's in a horribly dark and terrifying place. Still, Ryoma takes the plunge and willingly starts to wade through the deep, dark depths he knows his friend is suffering in, depths that he's familiar with and greet him like an old friend.

"I don't think you're going to get any answers for your questions any time soon," Ryoma admits. Kokichi stills. "But it sounds like to me you've been dealing with a lot for quite some time, haven't you?"

Kaito taught him how to believe with passion. Tenko taught him how to be a friend with purpose. Ryoma can't help but think that if it wasn't for them two, he wouldn't be able to find the right words to speak right now.

"Lying to us about being the mastermind and killing so many of our friends, that really wasn't okay," Ryoma says. "And believe me when I say if it wasn't for the fact that we're friends, I think things could be playing out a lot differently right now. I'm not impressed with the fact you lied but..."

He sighs.

"I don't particularly like kicking people when they're down and honestly, it looks like you've been through hell and back already. You're certainly not off the hook but I'm not about to turn this into a damn lecture either." Ryoma continues to search the depths. "You're going to have to give me something to work with though, kid. Anything. Not saying I'm going to be capable of fixing everything right away but I think it's about time you shared some of that weight you've been carrying around on your shoulders."

It's easier to be transparent, he thinks. There's no point offering Kokichi something he can't

deliver. All he needs is something to work with.

“I know trusting people can be scary, especially in a situation like this,” Ryoma says. “And I’m not asking you to completely open up to me right away. All I’m saying is I’m holding out a hand for you and I’d like for you to take it. As long as I know you’re still with us then that’s fine, I can work with that.”

He means it metaphorically but that doesn’t stop him from holding his hand out in person too, reaching up and holding it out steady in front of Kokichi, whose face is still hidden in his own hands.

“I’ve already lost far too many people already. Just, don’t add yourself to that list if you can help it.”

Ryoma swallows before casting his eyes to the floor. He’s never been one for words, never been one for emotions. He’s never been the person who has had to reach out before, especially to someone who is drowning in their own sorrow. He thinks maybe he’s screwed up. Said the wrong thing or something. He goes to put his hand back down when a tentative weight presses against his fingers and palm.

An uncertain hand reaches out from the darkest depth of despair and takes his own.

Ryoma looks down at his hand, something warm flickering in his chest as he also eyes the hand holding his own timidly. It’s a featherlike grip and Ryoma wonders if Kokichi is too scared to squeeze tight, afraid if he does so then he’ll shatter the fragile moment of calm. So to reassure Kokichi, Ryoma squeezes his hand firmly and the leader’s eyes go wide.

“C’mon, sit down with me for just a second,” Ryoma says, pulling Kokichi down beside him before pausing and holding out his other hand to Miu. “You too, both of you sit with me for a moment.”

Miu yelps as Ryoma takes her hand and pulls her so that she’s sitting on his other side. He squeezes their hands just to double check that all of this is real right now, pleased when he suddenly doesn’t start to grasp air instead.

“Know things aren’t looking so good right now but I think if we all stick together then things might be okay,” Ryoma tells them both, giving both of their hands another squeeze of reassurance.

“We’re all in the same scary situation and with how many of us are left, we don’t have the luxury of falling out with each other. I know I’m asking a lot from you both but do you think that just for now, can you both trust each other just a little?”

“W-Well...” Miu whimpers as her cheeks turn pink, looking down at the hand that’s holding her own cautiously. “I mean...at least he’s not actually the mastermind so...”

He takes that as a yes. “Ouma? What do you say? Think you can work with us?”

Kokichi gnaws on his bottom lip, head turned to the side in an attempt to hide his face. Ryoma isn’t sure what he’s thinking, how emerged he is from the depths just yet. He thinks that maybe he’s not going to say anything at all but when he hears a very quiet voice say, “I don’t think... Kiibo suffered much. I...She made me fall into him and he caught me but...we both ended up falling. I think...from what I remember, his death was instantaneous.”

It’s a frail olive branch but at least he’s offering one. Miu blinks slowly before her lip wobbles. “O-Oh...so it was quick then...”

As Miu cries silently on his left and Kokichi stares off into the distance on his right, Ryoma gives both their hands one last squeeze and thinks to himself that whilst the situation is still far from ideal, they're finally starting to head in the right direction.

He trusts that neither of them are about to start another argument any time soon so he leaves them both momentarily to check on Kaito.

Kaito should be in his bedroom. He's not.

The astronaut really was in a bad way when Ryoma left him so the worst case scenario is that he's simply still throwing up in the hangar bathroom. He tries to keep a straight face when Kokichi and Miu notice that he wasn't in the dormitory for very long.

"Don't look so worried," he tells them both. "He's probably still in the bathroom in the hangar since it was the most convenient place for him to go. I'll go and bring him back now."

He waits until they're both out of sight before upping his pace, almost practically running by the time he reaches the hangar. He's unfamiliar with the area but thankfully he doesn't get lost. There's a shutter and a window at the end of the hallway. When he approaches the shutter however, he realises with a frown that there's some sort of electric barrier activated. He steps back and pauses, wondering if he's simply at the wrong place when he hears someone call out his name.

Ryoma heads to the window and is more than relieved when he sees Kaito waiting for him. He peers past the astronaut and notices that he's in a bathroom, meaning Ryoma is at the right place. He just doesn't get why there's a barrier up.

"I thought I saw you!" Kaito quickly says, sounding worryingly relieved. "Fuck, is everything okay? They're both okay, right? Nothing bad happened-"

"Momota, calm down. Ouma and Iruma are fine," Ryoma tells him, brows creasing with worry when Kaito slumps his forehead against the window frame. "Are *you* okay, Momota? You are aware that there's a barrier covering the shutter so I can't get inside, right?"

Kaito nods breathlessly, holding up a finger in a silent request for Ryoma to wait just a second. He lifts his head up and smiles tiredly. "Yeah, so, uh, I'm pretty sure Shirogane has locked us both in."

"Oh." Ryoma pauses before massaging the bridge of his nose with a grimace. "Of course she has."

"You don't sound very surprised."

"Because I'm pretty sure she's the mastermind," Ryoma tells him. "No, I'm more than pretty sure, I'm confident that she is."

"Did Ouma tell you?" Kaito asks almost expectantly.

Ryoma frowns. "Not exactly but...did Ouma tell *you*?"

Kaito slips a piece of paper from his pocket and hands it to Ryoma, chuckling awkwardly as the tennis player notices the strange wording on the front. "Yeah, don't let the front of the letter fool you, this is definitely a will and whilst it's not signed, I'm more than confident only someone like Ouma would make a joke like that when writing a will."

Ryoma reads the will quietly.

'Shirogane is the mastermind. No matter how much she insists, don't let her have a retrial. Don't let her die, get her out of the game at all costs. Everything should make sense when you get on the other side of the wall. Thank you. Sorry.'

"Hoshi, why'd he leave this in my room?" Kaito asks with a frown. "Wills are for dead people. He is alright, isn't he? Don't really get why he left this in my room and then the next minute wanted us to believe he's the mastermind. I'm...really confused."

"His will actually makes a lot of sense once you know he lied about his instruction," Ryoma tells him with a sigh. Kaito blinks before opening his mouth. Ryoma quickly talks over him. "Look, there's no point stressing you out with the details. What's important right now is that he's safe. How are you doing anyway? You're..."

Kaito is not looking good at all. Greyish skin, bags under his eyes, smears of blood on his face...

"Could be better," Kaito admits. "Could be a lot better, actually."

"Do you know how to take the barrier down?" Ryoma asks. "There's no way I'm letting you stay in there when you're so ill. Why on earth has Shirogane locked you both inside? She's not doing this out of spite, is she?"

Kaito shakes his head. "Nah, don't think so. I think she still thinks I believe Ouma is the mastermind. She's done nothing but call out to Monokuma for a retrial or something but he's not shown up yet."

"What on earth does she want a retrial for?" Ryoma murmurs, putting a hand to his chin. "Perhaps Ouma knows. Haven't really had the chance to talk to him yet. Don't think he's up to talking yet though so..."

"But he's okay, right?" Kaito asks, his smile flickering momentarily. He leans in closer. "Hoshi, we're on the same wavelength, yeah? You still believe in him, right?"

Ryoma barely manages to hold back a large roll of his eyes. "You're not the only one who believes in him, you know?"

Kaito stills before grinning. "Aw man, I knew I was right to make you my sidekick!"

"Don't get me wrong, I don't think it was right of him to lie about something so serious but after dealing with him, I don't think he was maliciously trying to hurt us. I just think he had reached his breaking point," Ryoma says. He puts his hands into his pockets.

"To be honest, I was absolutely lost with what to do," Kaito admits. "One second he's leaving me information saying that Shirogane's the mastermind and then the next he's telling us all that he's the one in charge of the game. Man, I didn't know what to think. Then he said something that just, you know, clicked. He said he gave us a truth he wanted to believe in."

"So that's why you acted like you believed he was the mastermind in front of Shirogane?" Ryoma asks. "Because he wanted us to believe he was?"

Kaito rubs his nose almost bashfully as he says, "well you know, if someone I care about tells me to believe them for whatever reason then I will. If it ended up that Ouma had actually been telling the truth about being the mastermind then I would've only had myself to blame for trusting him."

"...you are actually so unbelievable sometimes," Ryoma sighs.

“H-Hey! You literally just told me you believed in him too!” Kaito retorts. “You played along as well!”

Ryoma pauses before scratching his cheek awkwardly. “Only because of you.”

“Then why are you lecturing me?!”

“I’m not,” Ryoma says before smiling softly, “I’ve just never blindly believed in someone before just because I wanted to. Even when Ouma was being stubborn about admitting he wasn’t actually the mastermind, I just, well, wanted to believe in him anyway. It’s your fault.”

Kaito pouts. “Don’t make it sound like I’m a bad influence!”

“I’m only teasing you,” Ryoma tells him. “I’ve got to admit it though, the kid is pretty damn lucky that he’s got you on his side. Think if things were different then I would’ve just ended up believing in his lies for all the wrong reasons and would’ve turned my back on him.”

The astronaut pumps one of his fists. “Well I decided a while back that I wanted to believe in him no matter what so of course even when he’s at his lowest point, I’m still going to pick to believe in him!” He laughs. “And we were both right to trust him! Although...”

“Hmm?”

“Did he tell you why he lied in the first place?” Kaito asks. “I mean, yeah, I know he was clearly having some sort of crisis but...”

Ryoma shakes his head. “Don’t have an exact reason just yet but I’ve got some suspicions. I plan to talk to him as soon as I get you out of here.”

“Ah...” Kaito clears his throat. “Hoshi, gonna be honest with you buddy but I don’t think I’m leaving this room anytime soon. There’s only one exit and that’s the shutter. Shirogane, well, let’s just say she’s not really in a place to negotiate with at the moment. I heard her laughing to herself before for like ten minutes straight. I think that Ouma claiming he’s the mastermind has stumped her and she’s waiting for Monokuma to show up to fix everything.”

“Haven’t seen Monokuma for a while,” Ryoma mumbles. “There is a chance Ouma might’ve broken him. He was going around breaking things whilst you were in here.”

Kaito looks at him with an expression that screams ‘dude, are you sure he’s actually alright?’ “I think we should just take advantage of the fact that, you know, Shirogane isn’t actually doing anything at the moment. If we start demanding that she takes the barriers down then she’s probably going to get defensive. Shouldn’t we take advantage of the fact she thinks we still think Ouma’s the mastermind?”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Well I don’t think she’s actually going to out herself until Monokuma gives her the go ahead and if you think Monokuma is missing then that means she’s basically stuck, right?” Kaito explains quietly. “We still need to break down the wall and it’ll probably be easier to do that if she’s out of the picture.”

Ryoma frowns. “So you...want me to just leave you alone with her?”

“I don’t really plan to leave this bathroom anytime soon and the bathroom door has a lock so I’ll be fine,” Kaito tells him. “I know I’m asking a lot of you to just leave me here but there’s no point

starting a confrontation over nothing and sabotaging the perfect chance to take the wall down. Remember what Ouma's will said? We need to get her out of the game and this might be our only opportunity to do so."

"But still, I really don't feel comfortable leaving you here alone with her. Should I stay?"

"Of course not. Ouma and Iruma need you," Kaito says. "So I need you to look after them, okay? And before you say it, yeah, I know I look like shit right now. But all I plan to do is just wait in here until you, Iruma and Ouma take the wall down, okay? I'm...really not up to moving from one place to another. Even standing is starting to take its toll."

Ryoma grimaces and opens his mouth to speak when he hears a knock on the bathroom door. He realises it's been a long time since his blood has boiled this hard when he hears Tsumugi call out to Kaito, asking if she can talk to him for a second. He almost wants to yell at the astronaut for willingly opening the bathroom door, biting down on his tongue when Tsumugi enters the bathroom.

Her hair looks like she's been running her hands through it for quite some time. She looks surprised to see Ryoma on the other side of the window and heads over to him with a confused frown.

Kaito quickly takes control of the conversation, slapping a hand down onto Tsumugi's shoulders as he says, "I was just telling Hoshi about how you locked us both in here to keep us safe. He's still looking for him. Man, Ouma's just as bad as Monokuma for hiding, isn't he?"

If Ryoma didn't know any better then he would've believed Kaito right away. He barely manages to stop himself from raising an eyebrow, clenching his fists tightly in his pockets instead.

"Have you seen Monokuma anywhere?" Tsumugi asks, basically just ignoring Kaito as she pokes her head out of the window. "We need to have a retrial, we need to ask Monokuma for a retrial!"

"Why?" Ryoma asks.

Tsumugi looks at him as if he just said something incredibly stupid. "Y-You heard what Ouma said before, right? Admitting to all those things...we need to figure out the truth! The game can't possibly be over until the bad guy gets defeated! He says that the game is over but..."

"Well how about this then?" Kaito says, giving Tsumugi's shoulder one last squeeze before letting his hand flop to his side. "How about Hoshi looks for Monokuma whilst we both wait here? You can do that, right, Hoshi?"

He never realised how comfortable Kaito has gotten with lying. He huffs. "Suppose I can keep an eye out for him whilst I continue to look for Ouma. Don't think it's safe for either of you to leave so until I apprehend him, just stay here now so I know where to find you both."

Tsumugi blinks before wringing her hands frantically by her waist. "How come you both turned on him so quickly? I thought you were all friends."

"Turns out our friendship was just another lie," Ryoma tells her. "Should've seen it coming, Ouma is a liar, after all."

Kaito tries to say something but turns pale as his body seizes up, another cough crawling up his throat. He puts a fisted hand to his mouth, holding up another hand to signal to both Tsumugi and Ryoma to not worry about him. Ryoma, however, worries regardless.

Tsumugi squirms before saying, “ugh, just hurry up and tell Monokuma that I’m in here, okay? The sooner we have a retrial, the better.”

She leaves the room, not even sparing Kaito a glance as she closes the door. The astronaut stumbles as he quickly turns the lock on it before slumping down the wall, streaking blood down the wall in the process. Ryoma barely holds back the urge to yell at Tsumugi to take down the electric barrier.

“Just...Just give me a minute,” Kaito heaves out as he wipes his chin with his sleeve. “Aw shit...”

“She’s hardly doing a very good job of acting like she isn’t involved with the game,” Ryoma points out bitterly before sighing. “Momota, you doing okay?”

Kaito nods, resting his head on his knee as he shudders miserably on the bathroom floor. “Mhmm.”

Ask a stupid question, get a stupid answer. “Momota, be honest with me. How long do you think you can hold out for? Don’t be overly optimistic with your answer either, I need to know how much time I’m working with.”

“...can’t really tell,” Kaito admits meekly. “I thought I had a lot longer than I anticipated but...”

“Momota,” Ryoma says warningly.

“...not long,” Kaito all but whispers as he puts a hand on his stomach. “I don’t know, I really don’t know. Days? Hours? Every time I think I’m doing better, I just cough up more blood and it’s...it’s really exhausting, you know?”

Being locked in a cold, cramped bathroom probably doesn’t help either. Ryoma scowls before taking a deep breath to calm himself down. “Momota, I know this is pretty selfish of me to ask but do you think you can try to hold out for as long as you can? I know you’re in pain but...please? For me?”

Kaito lets out a surprised laugh that quickly turns into a small cough. “O-Of course I’m going to hold out for as long as possible! I don’t plan on dying anytime soon-”

“Are you sure about that?” Ryoma asks, pulling a face when Kaito blinks at him. “Momota, I know you lied about your instruction. Why did you lie to all of us? I need to know you’re not just going to offer yourself up if push comes to shove. I need to know if you’ve still got some fight left in you.”

“I do, I do!” Kaito insists with a bitter smile. “I don’t want to fucking die, Hoshi. I want to live! I...”

Kaito suddenly looks uncharacteristically defeated. He sighs, curling up on himself even tighter on the bathroom floor with only the stitched on space and stars on the back of his jacket to keep him warm. Comforted.

“‘M sorry I lied,” Kaito mumbles. “My actual instruction...well, that doesn’t matter now. But just look at me. I just...want to be able to save everyone I care about, protect you all. I don’t want to die but I don’t want you all to die even more.”

His words instantly melt away at Ryoma’s defences. As much as he wants to drill it into Kaito’s head that he feels the exact same way, that he also will fight tooth and nail to protect the people he cares about, Kaito looks far too exhausted to be lectured. The corners of Ryoma’s mouth quirk upwards and he lets out an amused scoff. “That sounds about right for you.”

“I promise I’m not trying to actually die,” Kaito tells him. “I really, really don’t want to die. I’m… trying my best, okay? I promise I’m not going to go down without a fight.”

“That’s all I needed to hear,” Ryoma says.

Kaito might look exhausted but his grin still manages to shine bright. “Yeah, well, I wanna stick around long enough to make sure Shirogane doesn’t get away with any of this.” He clenches a fist. “After all, no one gets away with taking one of my sidekicks away from me.”

It was only this morning that Tenko was playing tennis with him. Ryoma looks down at his feet silently. It’s hard to accept that she’s dead, that Korekiyo killed her along with Kirumi. Her death was so sudden yet…a part of Ryoma feels like it was inevitable. After all, everyone he cares about always gets taken away from him eventually.

“Hey, stop looking so depressed!” Kaito shouts at him from the bathroom floor. “Geez, what would Chabashira say if she saw you wearing such an expression? I can hear her now telling you to keep your chin up!”

“I’m trying,” Ryoma tells him, slowly looking up from his feet. “I am.”

Kaito’s smile is bittersweet. “I know.”

When Ryoma leaves the hangar, he makes sure it’s with his head held high.

—

Miu and Kokichi are still where he left them, sitting under the vines of wisteria. He can tell there hasn’t been much conversation since Miu looks a little too relieved that he’s returned. Kokichi has his head resting on the picnic table and doesn’t lift it when Ryoma sits down next to him.

“Hah? Where’s space case?” Miu asks and Ryoma almost winces with how abrupt her question is. He notices that Kokichi has turned his head and Ryoma can see that he’s frowning.

“He’s…” There’s no point beating around the bush. “A bit too ill to move so we both decided that he should wait in the hangar bathroom until he’s feeling better.”

“Well shit…” Miu pulls a face. “Had no clue he was ill until I saw him coughing up blood. You’re confident that whatever he has isn’t infectious, right?”

Ryoma sighs. “He’s not infectious. Besides, we need to talk about more important things right now.” He tugs on his hat and prepares himself to explain the situation. “Shirogane is trying to summon Monokuma for a retrial but he’s not been responding to her. Have either of you seen him around?”

“Haven’t seen him since the trial,” Miu admits.

Kokichi slowly shakes his head.

“Then we need to keep an eye out for him, make sure he doesn’t get inside the hangar,” Ryoma says. He takes a deep breath before saying, “Ouma, Momota and I read your will in the hangar. Can you explain to us why we shouldn’t let her have a retrial?”

“What does that bitch want a retrial for anyway?” Miu huffs. “She does realise Monokuma always punishes the culprit, right?”

“That’s how she wants her game to end,” Kokichi murmurs so softly that Ryoma struggles to hear him. When he doesn’t expand any further, Ryoma realises that this conversation might take a while.

“So she wants to die then?” Miu asks. “Well isn’t that good for us? If she’s dead then we won’t have to deal with her bullshit.”

Ryoma senses from the way Kokichi’s shoulders suddenly tense up, it’s probably not that simple. “Ouma, I know you probably don’t want to talk right now but Iruma and I don’t know nearly as much as you do. Not asking for a full blown explanation from you but, well, we need something to work with.”

Kokichi continues to stay quiet, burying his head even further into his arms that are resting on the table. Ryoma knew the kid wasn’t just going to bounce back to his usual carefree attitude right away and it does concern him seeing Kokichi so quiet for once. He holds a hand up when Miu opens her mouth, sensing that she’s seconds away from yelling at Kokichi for some answers herself.

Ryoma pauses before trying a different approach. “Okay, if you don’t want to talk then can you just nod or shake your head instead? I’ve got a couple of questions that can be answered with a yes or a no so let’s deal with them first.”

“Ugh, this is gonna take ages,” Miu grumbles into her palm, turning her head away to hide how concerned she actually is.

“Remember during the time limit when you said we’re in a simulation?” Ryoma asks. “Were you actually telling the truth about that?”

Miu raises an eyebrow curiously as she sneakily watches Kokichi from the corner of her eye. There’s a moment where nothing happens before Kokichi nods into his arms.

“Do you know how to get out of the simulation?”

A more hesitant nod.

Miu slams her hands down onto the table suddenly with an excited look on her face. “*I got it!* If this *is* just some sort of simulation then that means the area we’re in is just some virtual world, right? The glass wall is basically just a barrier to stop us from loading out of it! In fact...” She rubs her chin before pointing at the stars in the sky. “I bet the sky isn’t actually real! If we’re just in a simulation then I bet there’s absolutely nothing outside of these walls and someone just changed the coding to make us think that there’s a sky out of the glass!”

Ryoma blinks. From the corner of his eye he sees Kokichi even lift his head up to stare owlishly at Miu.

“W-What?! Don’t look at me like I’m the crazy one around here,” she grumbles. “My explanation is completely reasonable.”

“To someone who has no experience with such advanced technology, it just sounds like you’re spouting a load of nonsense,” Ryoma admits, quickly shutting her down when she tries to argue. “Not saying I don’t believe you though, just saying I honestly didn’t understand a single thing you said.”

Miu sniffs. “Well of course you’re confused, you’re not a genius like I am.”

Ryoma sighs. "I mean, all I got from your explanation is that we're in some sort of...virtual world? Does that mean nothing that's happening right now is real?"

"No, no," Miu says. "It's more likely that...we're plugged into something somewhere else completely. If we're in a simulation then that means we're probably just avatars or something. However..." Miu starts to frown. "I didn't think such advanced simulations existed. We all feel pain, we clearly have the ability to bleed, Momota is sick as fuck. Either we're in the world's most advanced virtual world or someone purposefully made it so our avatars basically have the same capabilities of an actual human body."

"I don't remember entering a simulation," Ryoma says. "I remember waking up here but..."

"If we're in a simulation then it's not unreasonable that our memories can be easily altered," Miu tells him. "Honestly, it explains so much shit, especially how Monokuma has been able to summon punishments literally from thin air and has been building this school so quickly."

"You don't really sound too phased about any of this," Ryoma notes, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah, well, I have some experience with simulations and shit," Miu admits, twirling a strand of hair around her finger. "And honestly, I'm fucking hoping that Ouma isn't screwing us around. If we're in a simulation then..."

"...then?" Ryoma tilts his head to the side.

"That means everyone isn't actually dead," Miu tells him quietly. She runs a hand through her hair, letting out a relieved laugh. "It means we can see everyone again. I can see Kiibo again."

The revelation leaves him stunned. Ryoma struggles to find the right words to say as several emotions fight inside of him at once. As Miu giddily sits across from him with a wide grin on her face, he notices Kokichi once again resting his face into his arms. It's the one thing that stops him from celebrating.

"Kid?" He says quietly.

A realisation hits him. Kokichi has known that they've been in a simulation for a long time. Why didn't he tell everyone earlier? Plan to break down the wall sooner? Why isn't he happy?

Miu stops celebrating when she notices that she's the only one who is happy. "Hah? Why aren't you both more relieved? You do both realise that we've literally got nothing to worry about now, right?"

"I think there's a glitch," Kokichi mumbles. Miu falters. "If you die then you just wake up here again."

Miu blanches. "W-What?"

"We're...all stuck in some hellish loop of sorts," Kokichi says before snorting humourlessly. "We're in hell."

"Now hold on just a second," Ryoma intervenes. "You said that if you die then you just wake up here again. What happens to the people that survive?"

"Y-Yeah, don't our tablets say there were some students that have graduated from here?" Miu points out timidly. "T-That just means..."

“In order to leave the game, we just need to survive,” Ryoma says, “or from the sounds of it, get past the wall.”

“Well breaking the wall don’t won’t be an issue because of the gun I made,” Miu says. “It’s just charging right now but I’d say we can use it again in a couple of hours. As long as no one here stupidly dies then that means we can all just leave, right?”

Kokichi pauses before nodding numbly.

“Then why aren’t you more happy?” Miu asks. “In fact, why didn’t you tell us about any of this earlier?! A lot more of us could’ve left if you...” She hesitates when Kokichi flinches. Miu clears her throat. “A-Anyway...”

Ryoma takes a couple of moments to think before saying, “Ouma, you tried to break down the wall a week ago, didn’t you?”

“Hah?” Miu’s eyebrows rise so high that they end up being hidden by her bangs.

“After you were done training, you didn’t go to bed. You instead went back outside to figure out how to break the wall,” Ryoma says. “And Kiibo was with you, wasn’t he?”

That catches Miu’s attention. She crosses her arms but continues to silently listen.

Ryoma feels a flare of anger as he catches the mark on Kokichi’s wrist. “You were caught, weren’t you? It was Shirogane who caused you and Kiibo to fall down the stairs and whilst he died,” Ryoma says, grimacing when he spots how tense Kokichi’s shoulders go, “you didn’t and for whatever reason, Shirogane kept you captive overnight. She handcuffed you so you couldn’t escape-”

He abruptly stops when Kokichi hits the table with a trembling fist. “Enough. *Enough*. I already know that Shirogane is a despicable person. I know I was too slow. I know if I had just been a little quicker, a little smarter then more people would be alive. I already know all of this!”

“Ouma-”

Kokichi lifts his head from the table and glares intensely at him. “Just because we’re in a simulation doesn’t mean everything that has happened so far gets forgotten. How can I be relieved when I know I could’ve gotten more people out sooner?! This entire game could’ve ended with only Angie and Gonta as the only victims but Shirogane just kept cheating and cheating and *cheating and-*”

“Kid-”

“-I wanted her to be one of the survivors! I want her out of this game so she can’t keep fucking everyone over!” Kokichi’s bottom lip starts to wobble. “I thought I could just let the game run its course and make sure she survived. I...”

“You were planning on sacrificing all of us?!” Miu yelps incredulously.

“Iruma,” Ryoma murmurs disapprovingly.

“I don’t know! I-I don’t know!” Kokichi chokes out. “I didn’t know any of you when we first woke up here! I just thought...it would be easier for everyone in the long run if Shirogane wasn’t around. I knew that no one who dies here is actually dead so...”

“You ended up changing your mind though,” Ryoma realises. “Didn’t you?”

“I didn’t know about the wall being another potential exit until after Angie and Gonta were dead,” Kokichi tells them both, sounding almost desperate, as if he’s worried about either of them not believing him. “I didn’t know. I didn’t. I didn’t even plan to find another exit until...”

What happened after Angie and Gonta’s deaths that made Kokichi change his mind? Ryoma frowns before the answer becomes clear as day. The reason why Kokichi didn’t continue to let the game run its course is because he ended up getting too close with everyone. Kaito gave him a taste of what it’s like to be believed in and everything must’ve snowballed from there.

“I hate this game so much,” Kokichi tells them both with a voice heavy with exhaustion. “I...”

He rests his head back down onto the table, overwhelmed.

Ryoma gets it, he thinks. How can someone be relieved when so many people have died such pointless deaths? Kokichi said it before, this game was never supposed to happen yet Tsumugi forced it to. Just because everyone is going to wake up again eventually doesn’t mean they never made an impact during this game. Everyone existed here once, they were here. Memories were made, lives were changed. All the pain everyone felt when another person fell victim to the killing game was real. Is real. It still continues to be real.

Everyone here, every student that still remains, they all still have grief in their hearts. Even if everyone can be brought back again, it’ll be an empty victory. Once this game ends then another one will take its place and everyone will wake up again oblivious to what they’ve left behind.

It’s not just people who have died here, it’s the memories they had too. They’re never going to remember what an impact they made on another person’s life.

It makes Ryoma want to find a way to curl his hands around his own memories and hold them tight, to shield them from such a despairing fate. His desire to survive only grows. He wants to protect his memories, even the sad ones. He wants to be able to remember every single thing that has happened during this game, during this loop. He wants to be able to remember for everyone who can’t.

“I hate this fucking game too,” Miu says. “At least it’ll be over soon. As soon as my gun recharges we’re all leaving this hellhole.”

Whilst it’s a nice reassurance to hear, Ryoma still feels a slight twinge of discomfort. He looks at Kokichi, who is still hunched over the picnic table and then at the cracked wall. No one knows what’ll happen after this. Presumably they just leave but...their time here will be over soon.

He could hear the guilt in Kokichi’s voice before, could sense the frustration. So many more people could be here right now, so many more memories could’ve been preserved. It would feel wrong if they just leave without a proper goodbye. Ryoma stands up from the bench, earning a raised eyebrow from Miu.

“Ouma, just going to get something from your room,” Ryoma says and leaves before anyone can stop him. Kokichi’s door is unlocked and he quickly rifles through all the cardboard boxes until he finds what he’s looking for. Miu stares at him as he then dashes into the school and into the warehouse, looking up and down the shelves until he spots what he needs.

Even Kokichi has lifted his head from the table to curiously watch him. Ryoma places down a stack of portraits from under his arm and puts them on the table before dumping down a box with

photo frames and candles inside. He's well aware that Kokichi and Miu are watching him with baffled expressions as he slips the portraits into the photo frames and starts to stand them up one by one before placing the candles down appropriately.

Then, they must realise what he's doing because they both stand up, even Kokichi, as he lights the candles with a box of matches from the warehouse.

All three of them quietly look at the portraits of their dead classmates, their printed faces illuminated by the warm glow created by the candles. Ryoma feels surprisingly overwhelmed all of a sudden and swallows a lump in his throat. There's six portraits on the table and only three people are around to look at them.

No one says anything for a while. Seeing the faces of all their dead classmates lined up in a row is unsurprisingly very sobering. It's a reality check and he can see it in Miu's eyes that she finally realises that just because they're in a simulation and can get to leave, that doesn't change the fact that something very important has been lost.

Funerals are for goodbyes. Even if they have the chance to see their friends again, the first thing they're going to say isn't going to be 'I missed you.' It's going to be 'it's nice to meet you.'

Ryoma blinks when he feels something press into his hand before noticing that Kokichi has bumped his hand with his own, as if asking for permission. The tennis player lets out an amused huff and squeezes the kid's hand hard.

"Thank you," Kokichi says softly and Ryoma knows his gratitude isn't just for the simple act of holding his hand right now.

—

He decides to check up on Kaito again. The three of them are currently in Miu's lab. Miu is tinkering with something in the corner whilst Kokichi looks at him expectantly when he stands up to leave.

"I want to come," Kokichi tells him. "To see Momota."

Ryoma looks at the gun that is still charging and then at Kokichi. Whilst he would rather have two people keeping an eye on the gun, Kokichi isn't giving him much of an option since he's already making his way over to the door.

Miu huffs. "You seriously want me to watch it by myself? What if Shirogane leaves and tries to take it?"

"She won't be able to pass us without us noticing her," Ryoma tells her. "But Ouma, if she sees you then she's going to catch on to the fact that I'm clearly not looking for Monokuma for her."

He had filled both Kokichi and Miu in before on how Tsumugi thinks he's looking for Monokuma so Tsumugi can request a retrial. Kokichi had told him that she's probably desperate to talk to him because he tells her everything that is going on. Since the two haven't been able to speak since after the trial, Tsumugi is probably very lost right now.

The only question is where is Monokuma right now? Perhaps he's too intimidated to try and sneak past everyone at the moment. After all, if he knows that Motherkuma (apparently that's her name) is broken then he knows he won't be able to be brought back again.

"Please," Kokichi says and Ryoma curses himself for being so soft.

They both bring along a blanket. Ryoma had noticed how cold it was last time he was in the hangar and he doubts that Kaito's jacket is going to be enough to keep the astronaut warm for much longer. He gestures for Kokichi to wait whilst he checks that it's clear for him to join him. When he doesn't spot any sign of Tsumugi anywhere, he waves him forward.

To say that Kaito looks worse is a rather large understatement. For a second Ryoma panics that the astronaut is dead when he peers into the bathroom and notices that Kaito is slouched against the toilet, arm dangling by his side. He barely feels comforted when he calls out Kaito's name and sees the astronaut's hand twitch before he lifts his head up.

"Hoshi?" Kaito mumbles. Straight away the tennis player spots that Kaito's shirt is more bloody than not. His eyes do however light up when he spots Kokichi behind him and with shaky hands, he pulls himself closer to the window.

"Has Shirogane not even bothered to check in on you?" Ryoma asks, scowling at the bathroom door as Kaito makes his way over to them both.

Kaito shakes his head before tripping, barely catching himself on the window frame. His breathing sounds uncomfortably ragged and it's becoming painfully obvious that it's taking everything out of the astronaut for him to even stand. Before Ryoma can tell him to sit down however, Kaito readjusts his grip on the window frame and smiles at him wanly.

"Don't want her to check up on me anyway," Kaito garbles with a sniff. The amount of blood he's lost must be affecting his speech. "Just...need my sidekick and partner in crime to keep me going..."

"Christ, Momota, sit down before you hurt yourself," Ryoma tells him, grimacing when Kaito ignores him.

"M fine," he insists and the cough he lets out afterwards says otherwise. "Both of you need to quit looking so worried, I can totally hold out for just a little longer, you know?"

Kokichi frowns and steps closer to the window before reaching his arms inside, draping the blanket he brought around the astronaut. Ryoma watches as Kaito blinks slowly before letting the most smitten grin grow on his face. The leader is silent as he presses the back of his hand to Kaito's forehead and Ryoma hears the small sharp intake of breath Kokichi takes before trying to pull his hand away. Kaito is clearly a lot more disorientated than anticipated as he grabs Kokichi's hand and lowers it to his cheek, letting out a sigh of relief from the cold feeling.

"Had me fucking worried for moment, you know?" Kaito mumbles, closing his eyes as he sinks his face into Kokichi's hand even further. "But I didn't stop believing in you once, Ouma. *Kokichi*. And I knew Hoshi would be able to talk sense back into you. God, I knew I picked the right people to believe in..."

His words would be sweet if Ryoma wasn't convinced that Kaito is seconds away from nose diving into the floor. He wants to be more angry that Kaito has clearly been downplaying how bad he is but it's not like there's much he can do about it now. All he can do is just hope Kaito doesn't even get any worse.

"I've done good this time, right?" Kaito continues quietly and Ryoma shares a look of confusion with Kokichi. "I hate this fucking bathroom, hate how it makes me feel. Makes me feel like something horrible is going to happen." The astronaut slowly opens his eyes. "Although seeing you both on the other side of the window...that makes me feel better."

“Momota, what are you on about?” Ryoma asks. “And seriously, sit down before you hurt yourself.” He feels like he’s talking to a drunk friend. Only, Kaito isn’t drunk from alcohol, it’s the blood loss that’s making him delirious.

“...just saying what’s on my mind,” Kaito admits quietly before squeezing Kokichi’s hand tightly. “Dude, make your hand cold again.”

Kokichi cracks the first surprised smile that Ryoma has seen in the last couple of hours before smartly swapping his hands instead. Kaito quickly latches onto his new cold source. Ryoma simply watches them both and thinks, yep, these are the two people he’d fight the entire world for if it meant keeping them safe.

“How long do you reckon it’ll take to break the wall down?” Kaito asks. “There’s...already a giant crack in the wall, right?”

“Iruma thinks we just need to shoot the wall one more time and we should have a hole we can go through,” Ryoma reassures him.

“Shoot?” Kaito blinks. “Did she make a gun or something?”

Ryoma nods. “Yeah, we’re just waiting for it to charge now.”

“Cool...” Kaito pauses as he sways. “So...we just need to get Shirogane past the wall, right? Don’t know how you’re going to be able to convince her to leave though...”

“We’ll lure her out,” Ryoma says. “Don’t you worry about that. You need to focus on looking after yourself.”

“I’m...” Kaito almost pouts when he moves a little too suddenly, causing the blanket to slip from one of his shoulders. “I’m fine.”

The astronaut very carefully knocks Kokichi’s hand away so he can focus on pulling his blanket around his shoulders. Ryoma is reminded of a hero putting on his cape. “Momota-”

“I don’t want either of you to worry about me,” Kaito says softly. “Worry about each other. Getting the wall down. Keeping safe. That’s all I want. If you’ve got time to be worrying about me then you’re not worrying enough about everything else.”

Kokichi bites his lip and visibly hesitates. It’s so strange seeing him so subdued.

“We’re both always going to worry about you,” Ryoma tells him firmly. “Momota, maybe we should just tell Shirogane that her time is up-”

“She’ll never leave if we try to corner her,” Kaito tells him before shuddering. He wraps the blanket around himself just a little tighter. “A-As long as she thinks you’re preoccupied with looking for Monokuma then we won’t have to worry about her.”

“She doesn’t have any reason to keep you locked in the bathroom though,” Ryoma retorts.

Kaito smiles bitterly. “As far as she’s concerned, she’s keeping us safe from Kokichi, remember?”

“Yet she hasn’t even brought up Iruma once,” Ryoma grumbles. “If I didn’t already know she’s the mastermind then her sloppy act of pretending to worry about everyone would’ve tipped me off ages ago.”

Kaito barks out a laugh. “Yeah, well, intentionally or not Kokichi did buy us time by claiming he was the mastermind. Good job, partner.”

“Wasn’t intentional,” Kokichi grumbles before fiddling with his scarf.

Kaito’s expression softens. “I know. But hey, lucky for you I’m not the only person who believes in you. You gotta thank Hoshi for trusting you too.”

“I know he’s grateful,” Ryoma reassures him before giving Kokichi’s shoulder a squeeze. “So…”

“You both should go in case Shirogane decides to make an appearance,” Kaito says. “Not saying I don’t want you around but…from the sounds of it, you’ve got a solid plan to get us out of here. We’re so close to leaving, I can feel it in my bones.”

Ryoma pulls a face. “Hate the idea of leaving you here alone though.”

“I just need to wait for a couple more hours at best, right?” Kaito responds. “C’mon, don’t turn this into some dramatic goodbye. We’ll be training together soon before you both realise!”

There’s a knock on the bathroom door and Kaito looks at them both expectantly. Well, this is the perfect cue to leave. Ryoma waves a hand lazily whilst Kokichi stays still. Kaito sighs before ruffling the leader’s hair, whispering quietly, “don’t look so worried, this isn’t goodbye, you know? You’ve got Hoshi to look after you and you need to look after him too, got it?”

His words work like magic and Ryoma easily pulls Kokichi away from the window. They both leave the hangar silently.

—

Since he realises he can’t sit still, Ryoma ends up patrolling for Monokuma. He has a racket in one hand and a ball in another. Getting rid of him sounds like an ideal plan. He’s left Kokichi in Miu’s lab so he’s on his own.

He can’t help but think to himself that it’s been a very long day. So much has happened in the span of twenty four hours. Even Korekiyo’s punishment feels like it happened years ago instead of hours. He checks the school quietly, not entirely sure if he’s enjoying the peace or not.

Ryoma stops outside of the room where Korekiyo had hid himself in and feels his chest tighten. He’s rather surprised to see that Tenko and Kirumi are still lying on the floor. He supposes with how much has happened in such a short amount of time, Monokuma hasn’t had the chance to clean up their bodies yet. Still, it almost feels disrespectful to just leave them lying there.

He remembers that there’s some sheets of white cloth in Korekiyo’s lab and brings them to the room, carefully draping the cloth over the bodies wordlessly, careful not to disturb either body too much. This is the first time Monokuma hasn’t cleaned up any remaining bodies, although he thinks this is just a special circumstance due to Kokichi pulling the rug from under everyone’s feet.

Something catches in his throat and he pauses when he reaches Tenko’s face with the cloth. It takes him a second to register that his cheeks are wet and the tennis player swears softly to himself as he gently finishes placing the cloth over Tenko before wiping his eyes furiously with the sleeve of his leather jacket.

Ah, he’s spent so much time dealing with a lot at once that he had to put his own time to grieve properly on the back burner. He supposes this was inevitable, especially since he wasn’t expecting to see Tenko and Kirumi’s bodies. He ends up kneeling next to the aikido master, sniffing noisily

as he tries to stop making a fool of himself. Then again, Tenko would probably welcome this sort of behaviour.

He never got the chance to thank her for being his friend. The next time Tenko sees him she's going to look at him like he's a stranger. The realisation hurts.

Poor Kirumi too. She didn't deserve this, she didn't deserve to become another victim of this killing game. All she ever wanted to do was help people.

His tears are for both of them, he realises.

Ryoma supposes he needs this moment to himself. He's never had to be the strong one before, the one people turn to for help. It's a scary brand new experience. He wipes the last streak of tears from his cheeks and stands up, grabbing his racket and ball again before leaving the room with a silent goodbye.

The school turns out to be empty but he *does* surprisingly spot Monokuma when he's heading down the steps outside, spotting the bear doing a mad dash towards the hangar. Clearly he saw an opportunity to run and took it. Unfortunately for him, Ryoma is a rather good shot. Despite the distance, Ryoma manages to fire the ball straight through Monokuma's head and the tennis player feels rather satisfied as he watches Monokuma slump onto the floor. He makes sure to pick him up before going to Miu's lab.

When he's inside, he spots that she's still hammering away at something whilst Kokichi dozes on her couch quietly. Miu looks over her shoulder at him and acknowledges him with a nod.

"Just took Monokuma out," Ryoma tells her as he sits on the couch by Kokichi.

"Oh?" Miu raises an eyebrow curiously. "So we don't have to worry about him anymore?"

"Just need to wait for the gun to charge and figure out a way to lure Shirogane out," Ryoma responds. He jumps when Kokichi's head ends up on his shoulder before the leader slumps even further and his head lands on his thigh. Ryoma blinks before sighing.

"Don't think the gun has long left," Miu reassures him. "Just a couple more hours and then we can leave this shithole for good."

Ryoma smiles grimly. "Good."

"Ouma wrote some instructions for everyone in the next loop, by the way," Miu says and gestures towards a book on her desk. "Y'know, to catch everyone up quickly. Apparently if you leave something behind then it stays here and there's no point letting everyone run around like headless chickens so..."

"Ah, that sounds like a good idea," Ryoma murmurs before running a hand through Kokichi's hair. The action reminds him of when he used to have cats to pet. Kokichi stirs but doesn't wake up. "Y'know, this is the first time in hours where I've managed to take a moment to just catch my breath."

"Today has been pretty fucking full on," Miu agrees. "Just glad we can leave soon. I'm serious, I'm done with this place."

Unfortunately said place isn't done with everyone who has died just yet. "You can say that again."

Ryoma must end up getting too comfortable or is more exhausted than he thought. The sound of

Miu tinkering with something and the warmth Kokichi's body heat is providing him is enough to lull him to sleep. He dozes on Miu's couch, oblivious when Miu clicks her tongue at him and mutters something about making her have to watch the gun alone.

(She falls asleep too eventually, snoring as she rests her head on her desk. Looks like today really has taken its toll on everyone.)

Ryoma wakes up to the gun making a loud beep. He rubs his eyes and peers over at it curiously, something fluttering in his stomach when he realises the gun must finally be charged. He spots Miu lift her head up from the desk, grumbling to herself before flushing when she notices that Ryoma has spotted her.

"Do I have drool on my face or something?" Miu grumbles, wiping her face before Ryoma can reassure her that her face is fine. She then blinks when she looks at her gun and her eyes go wide with excitement. "Holy shit, it's finished charging!"

She dashes over to it and eyes it hungrily. As she checks the gun over with a grin, Ryoma carefully shakes Kokichi's shoulder, waking him up slowly. The leader blinks at him before sitting up carefully.

"Fuck yeah, everything looks like it's working fine!" Miu shows them the gun proudly. "All we have left to do is use this bad boy and get the hell out of this dump! You both better get down on your knees and thank me for being your gorgeous saviour!"

"Not so fast, Iruma," Ryoma sighs, voice still heavy with sleep. "Before you start going all trigger happy just let me just tell Momota what we're doing. Think it might surprise him if he hears the wall be broken so suddenly."

As Ryoma steps outside, he notices that the sun is starting to rise. Red bleeds into a fading starry sky. Wow, he must've been asleep for quite some time. He hopes Kaito is doing okay. Hopefully he's been resting well.

Ryoma stretches as Kokichi and Miu follow him out. Miu has her gun in her hands whilst Kokichi is empty handed.

They reach the end of the hangar and Ryoma abruptly pauses when he realises something is off. The electric barrier is down. His stomach clenches uncomfortably as he leads Kokichi and Miu forwards warily.

The only thing in the bathroom is the blanket he and Kokichi had brought Kaito earlier.

"Hah? I thought you said Momota was in the bathroom?" Miu asks.

"He should've been," Ryoma tells her with a frown before heading over to the shutter. "And there should be an electric barrier too..."

"Did...they both leave whilst we were asleep?" Miu ponders and hugs her gun tightly to her chest.

Ryoma doesn't respond and something icy fills his veins as he crouches down to grab the bottom of the shutter, Kokichi quickly joining him. Both of them grunt as they lift the shutter up together, both of their hands equally as shaky as the shutter rolls into itself loudly.

The shutter is loud but once Ryoma takes a look inside of the room Tsumugi had locked herself and Kaito in, suddenly the shutter sounds like it's miles away.

He misses the sharp breath Miu sucks in and how she almost drops her gun. He misses how Kokichi blinks with a blank expression.

He's much too focussed on the blood that oozes from the hydraulic press, on the purple sleeve that is dangling from the machine.

(Did she get too impatient? Did she figure out what they were up to? He doesn't know. He doesn't know. How did this happen? Why did this happen? Kaito had told him that they were all going to train again very soon. Kaito didn't want to say goodbye. He thought he was going to see everyone again.)

"Oh my." Ryoma barely manages to tear his eyes away from the press. He spots Tsumugi standing by a control panel, a hand pressed down heavily on a button and a wild grin on her face. "It looks like a body has been discovered."

Encore - Part 2

Chapter Notes

Well this is it, here's the final chapter of Kokichi's loop!

Just a heads up but this chapter is dark. It's easily the darkest chapter of this entire fic so far. I would just like to warn everyone that this chapter includes referenced/implied self harm and also extremely suicidal thoughts/idealisation. If either of these topics are too upsetting to read then I would urge anyone reading to give this chapter a miss and to be careful.

Thank you to everyone who has left a comment on this fic so far, I really do mean it when they mean a lot! It makes my day when I spot an email notification telling me someone has left a comment!

And with that, I hope you all enjoy my writing!

Have a nice day!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Everyone is silent.

It's understandable really. Kokichi's mind blanks as he blinks slowly at the hydraulic press, at the blood that stains it messily. There's really no right thing to say at the moment. Even if he didn't already feel like he was drowning, he thinks he still would be quiet anyway. He supposes if he had to pick something to say, to utter meekly in disbelief then he'd pick to say *why*.

Tsumugi watches them all like a hawk from the control panel, eagerly waiting for someone to say something. Anything. She looks like she's enjoying herself. She's probably the only person in the room who is having a good time at the moment. Tsumugi's clearly in her element, gleefully examining the ranged looks of anguish and shock on everyone's faces. She...really is willing to do anything just to cause despair.

"C'mon, someone say something!" Tsumugi's grin warps into something much more sinister, much more terrifying. "I bet none of you expected *this*, right?!"

Plot twist after plot twist. She's right, Kokichi really didn't expect to walk in on something like this. As he blinks slowly at the smear of pink encasing the press, he realises something. He doesn't feel cold. He doesn't feel angry. He doesn't feel sad. He doesn't feel horrified.

He feels *numb*.

Tsumugi sneers as no one even bothers to spare a glance in her direction. She jabs a finger at the hydraulic press, her blood red fingernail standing out under the sickly lighting of the room. "*This* is what happens when you try to take *my* game away from me! This is why you don't take something that's *mine*!" Tsumugi cackles as she leans forward over the yellow railings. "Doesn't feel so nice when something important to you is snatched away now does it?! Poor Momota could've made it to the end but you just had to try and one up me!"

Kokichi is vaguely aware that she's mostly yelling at him. Her voice sounds somewhat muted to him, distant. He turns to look at her anyway, eyes vacant as they land on her hunched form. When their eyes meet, her expression twists into something ugly and elated.

"Don't you see?" Tsumugi asks him, spit flying from her mouth as she cackles again. "I *can't* lose this game! Even if you try and take everything from me, there's always another way for me to win!"

The giggle she lets out bounces around the room. Well then, it seems she's done playing the meek, plain victim. The true mastermind has finally come out to play and it's clear that they don't want to play nice. Tsumugi is practically drooling as she turns her attention back to the bloodied hydraulic press.

"This is the part where you all tell me how much of a horrible person I am," Tsumugi prompts them expectantly. "Because *I've* been the one who has been working with Monokuma all along to this game to happen! *Me!* I'm the villain of this game!"

Her smile twitches when she's met with another round of silence. Tsumugi clears her throat before spreading her arms out wide, waving her hands ever so slightly in an attempt to catch someone's attention.

"Oh, I get it! You all must still be in shock!" Tsumugi smiles brightly. "I suppose I should've realised that the press was always going to be the centre of attention. You can all look at me now though! *Me!* You know, the person responsible for all of this? Momota wouldn't have been crushed if it wasn't for me! Don't any of you have anything you want to say to me?"

She's fishing for a response. Her smile outright disappears for a moment as Kokichi silently looks away from her and back at the blood. The cosplayer clears her throat and instantly plasters another grin on her face. Her hands wrap tightly around the yellow poles near the control panel.

"Hello?" She blinks. "C'mon, at least one of you must have something to say to me, right? Iruma? Hoshi?" Her grin grows. "Ouma?"

Perhaps they're all on the same wavelength. Neither Miu or Ryoma even twitch as Tsumugi calls their names, both of them equally fixated on the mess caused by the press. It's very hard not to look at. It's even more difficult to believe that there's a person in the midst of all that mess, reduced to nothing but blood and gore. If the situation was different, maybe Kokichi would be gagging right now. Instead, he simply stares at what used to be Kaito.

It was only a couple of hours ago that Kaito was telling him that they'd be training together soon. The astronaut refused to tell him goodbye because he thought he was going to see everyone again, he believed that he was going to leave with everyone.

What sort of...monster does this to a person? Tsumugi didn't have to put Kaito into the press, she didn't have to crush him and turn him into an unrecognisable mess. She didn't have to go this far. She *didn't*.

Kaito was *so* close to making it to the end of the game, so close. Now he's just another victim, another person lost to this killing game. Someone else who was killed by Tsumugi.

It's exhausting having to recall all of the people Tsumugi has sacrificed just to get to where she is. That's the main issue, Kokichi is *exhausted*. He's bone tired. It wasn't a feeling of '*oh no*' that hit him when he saw the blood oozing from the hydraulic press, it was a feeling of '*oh, another person has died.*' He's surprised, of course he's surprised because Tsumugi needlessly crushed Kaito's

body and is very proud of her cruel way of making it known that a body has just been discovered. It's just...he's gotten so used to seeing despair and death and bodies that he can't bring himself to do anything else but stare owlshly.

If Tsumugi wants some sort of epic showdown then she's going to have to look somewhere else.

Tsumugi starts to scoff. "Seriously? None of you have anything to say? And here I thought I was the heartless one. Aren't you all going to tell me off? Demand to see me punished for doing such terrible things? I've enjoyed every second of this game, you know? Every. Single. Second."

Kokichi catches Ryoma slowly rolling his eyes over to Tsumugi to stare at her with disdain. It looks like he's about to say something before he changes his mind, shaking his head as he shoves his hands into his pockets. He turns his back completely on Tsumugi.

"Y'know, I thought someone would've said something by now," Tsumugi tells them. There's a dangerous edge to her voice. She sounds almost irritated. "Ugh, okay so I *might've* gone a little overboard with crushing Momota but it had to be done! We're in the endgame now so all the stakes have been upped! Everything has to be a little more..." She waves her hands around, grasping the air as she tries to find the right word to use. "*Dramatic*. Entertaining. Mysterious."

Miu has started to grind her teeth together. Kokichi can tell by her pinched expression that she wants to say something but doesn't want to be the one who takes the first hit. After all, if one of them entertains Tsumugi with any sort of response then she's going to have something to latch onto, something to sink her fingernails into.

Tsumugi pouts. "C'mon guys! Give me at least something to work with here! I've put you all through hell! I'm holding my hands up and telling you all that I'm the one responsible for this game! I'm literally handing myself over to you all on a silver platter so why are none of you saying anything?!"

She pulls a face as she skips down the steps and stands by them near the press, clasping her hands behind her back. There's an expectant look in her eyes and she watches them all mercilessly, waiting for a slight crack to appear so she can take full advantage.

During the start of the game, Kokichi never really thought that Tsumugi would want to be caught. Now he realises he couldn't have been more wrong. Even though Monokuma isn't around, she's still forcing some sort of discussion, some sort of trial. She *wants* to be caught. She wants to feel the pain of falling at the last hurdle. She wants her victory to be stolen from her at the last second. After all, what's more despairing than losing everything at a moment's notice?

If they argue with her then they'll only be fuelling her ego, giving her exactly what she wants. Tsumugi has no self respect. She's stooped down to unfathomable levels just to taste even a *drop* of despair. She's *addicted* to it. Obsessed. She's someone who drowned in it a very long time ago and had no one around to save her. Kokichi would pity her if he didn't hate her so much.

Does she honestly think she's doing everyone a favour by trying to make them feel how she feels? The last couple of hours of Kokichi's life have been torture. Hell. He didn't know his mind could wander into such dark places, could make the world seem so bleak. He almost suffocated under the weight of it all, the soul crushing feeling of helplessness that wrapped around his body and squeezed unforgivingly.

He doesn't want to go back into that dark place, he doesn't think he'll survive if he does. Even though he's teetering on the edge right now, staring down at the entrance to hell once again, something is keeping him from falling again. Something tiny and fragile and impossible yet it's

something he's clinging onto desperately.

Truth is, he just doesn't want to believe that Kaito is under the press.

Maybe he's already fallen back into the same dark place again. After all, only someone delusional would dare to think that maybe Kaito is alive right now when there's no evidence to suggest that he's still breathing. Perhaps he's in denial and that's why even though he's literally staring at what clearly is the aftermath of someone being crushed, he just doesn't want to believe that Kaito is dead.

Ryoma looks like he's struggling, fists tight and tense in his pockets. He must've run out of candy cigarettes to chew on since he's currently gnawing at his bottom lip to the point of turning it bloody. Is he also in denial? All he's been doing for the last couple of hours is single-handedly keep everyone from falling apart. Is *this* what's going to break him?

Miu has gone pale. Her skin looks uncomfortably clammy as she clutches her gun to her chest like a lifeline. Even though she didn't know Kaito all that well, her reaction is understandable. She did just walk in on a rather horrific scene and hasn't screamed once.

"Do I have to spell it out for all of you?" Tsumugi asks, rolling her eyes. "A body has been discovered. Momota is dead. We need to discuss what happened to him so we can punish the person responsible for all of this. In fact, we need to discuss a lot of things so instead of standing around like a bunch of idiots, how about we head to the trial room and get talking?"

The fact that she isn't even demanding everyone to do some sort of investigation says a lot. Clearly she knows everyone has figured her out and knows there's only one person responsible for all of this. She's made it very clear that she's a monster.

"Ugh, I mean, *yeah*, it's not going to be the same without Monokuma," Tsumugi says as she shoots everyone a dry look. "Totally not cool that one of you broke him *and* Motherkuma, by the way. But we can all improvise, right? It's not the end of the world!"

Her smile is starting to look very fake. Plastic.

"Are you guys seriously just not going to say anything?" The cosplayer raises an eyebrow before looking down at the press with a bored expression. "I mean, your silence is admirable but it's starting to get a little annoying now. I can't just have a discussion all by myself, you know? There's so much for all of us to talk about, secrets that need to be revealed, decisions that need to be made..."

She looks at the gun in Miu's hand. The inventor clings onto it just a little tighter.

"You can all break the wall down after I'm gone, okay? Seriously, like, no strings attached. It's a fair deal, right? It's how every game usually goes. There's a class trial, the mastermind reveals themselves, they get punished and then it's all over," Tsumugi says. "I mean, without Monokuma around I'm not going to get a very fun punishment but I'm sure between the three of you, well, you should all be able to think of an entertaining way to put me down."

She's talking about herself as if she's just some animal. It's absolutely insane.

"And I'm literally giving you all a freebie too," Tsumugi presses. "You all read the rules, right? The game is only supposed to end when there's two survivors but I'm cutting my losses and letting *three* of you survive. You can all take down the wall after you're all done with me and leave this place together. Doesn't that sound like the perfect ending to this game?"

Miu licks her lips as she starts to look a little too tempted.

Tsumugi holds her hands out enticingly, begging for someone to be drawn in by her offer. “C’mon, I’m not asking for much. In fact, I think I’m being really generous. It’s not everyday the bad guy lets you punish them, you know? I promise I’m not even going to try and worm my way out of this situation. I just want you all to join me for one last discussion. That’s not too much to ask for, right?”

She has some nerve.

The cosplayer’s patience must be starting to wear thin. She licks her lip with a grimace before worrying her lip between her teeth. “This isn’t going to a class trial just for Momota, you know? It’s going to be a class trial for everyone who has died. I mean, if you all think real hard, didn’t something seem off about Gonta’s trial?”

Tsumugi hums almost playfully as she tip toes closer to Miu.

“And it’s rather naïve of you all to presume that Kiibo magically managed to fall down the stairs,” Tsumugi continues. “Wouldn’t it be nice to hear what happened to him? If you all have one final trial with me then I’ll tell all of you everything.”

“We already know what happened to everyone who died,” Ryoma tells her. He doesn’t even flinch as Tsumugi snaps her head in his direction and stalks over to him with a starving look in her eyes. He raises a brow at her. “None of us are going to have a class trial with you, Shirogane.”

“You are!” Tsumugi insists.

“Oh? And what are you going to do to us if we refuse then?” Ryoma counters. “This game is over, Shirogane.”

“It’s *not*! It’s over when *I* say it is!” Tsumugi snaps. One of her eyes starts to twitch. “So c’mon, let’s talk about-”

“Will you shut up already?! You sound like a broken fucking record,” Miu groans before letting out a loud *tsk*. “We all heard you the first time, you four eyed freak. You don’t have to keep yapping.”

“Well if one of you just responded earlier then-”

“Shirogane. Shut up.” Ryoma narrows his eyes at her.

Tsumugi acts like she’s just been slapped. “I...I don’t understand what’s going on. Do none of you care? This is everyone’s big chance to get everyone who has died the justice they deserve!”

“No, you just want to cause more needless suffering,” Ryoma tells her. “Besides, what’s the point in having a discussion when we all know everything anyway? We know what sort of person you are, Shirogane. We already knew before we got here that you’re the mastermind.”

“T-Then do something!” Tsumugi yells at him. “You’re seriously not just going to not let me go unpunished, right? After everything I did? I deserve a fate worse than death and since Monokuma isn’t around to punish me, you can all decide how I get to die instead!”

Ryoma raises a brow. “You want us to kill you?”

Tsumugi nods furiously with a horrifyingly earnest look on her face. “*Yes!* That’s *exactly* what I

want! Since Monokuma can't kill me I'll let all of you punish me instead! It's only fair, right? I've put you all through hell! Don't you all want some sort of revenge?"

"The only thing I want is to get you out of this game," Kokichi tells her quietly. His voice is so soft that it's a miracle anyone hears him. However, it's obvious that Tsumugi heard him loud and clear because she blinks at him incredulously before giggling harshly, clutching at her stomach.

"Oh...oh *wow*," Tsumugi chuckles, wiping a tear from her eye, "after all I've done, you think that letting me leave, letting me *survive* is the right thing to do? No one is going to blame you for wanting me dead, Ouma. I know you like to lie but I thought you at least liked to tell believable lies."

Kokichi crosses his arms and fixes her with a flat expression.

"Wait..." Tsumugi's face contorts into manic disbelief as she shakes her head at him, her smile convulsing as she drags her fingers through her hair. "...oh, I get it now! That's why you've been so quiet about everything all this time! Even though you've known from the very start how horrible of a person I am, you kept quiet because you *thought* you could force me out of my own game!"

"Shirogane," Ryoma mutters warningly.

"How...*cute* of you. Naïve," Tsumugi says. "I thought it was weird that you didn't say anything for so long. I just thought you were waiting for the right moment to expose me. Oh my, I've sorely underestimated you." She giggles into the palms of her hands. "I should've known something was up when you suddenly became fascinated with taking the wall down! Here I thought you were wholeheartedly enjoying the killing game just as much as I was."

"The only person here who is sick enough to enjoy a game like this is you," Ryoma tells her.

"Eh?" Tsumugi makes an exaggerated noise of confusion. "At least I'm being honest about how much I love this game! I wanted to be found out in the end! Ouma's the one who could've put a stop to the game ages ago but didn't. Instead, he let everyone die one by one-"

Kokichi flinches as Ryoma frowns at her. "Don't you dare try to make it sound like he wanted this killing game as much as you."

"I'm just saying, he literally could've opened his mouth at any point and told you all that I was the mastermind," Tsumugi says. "But he didn't and look how things have turned out. There's only four of us left and honestly, everyone could've left this game alive if he had said something sooner. Just some food for thought."

"The difference between you and Ouma is that at least he didn't go around killing people," Ryoma snaps. "You on the other hand-"

"Hmm, I dunno..." Tsumugi hums thoughtfully as she clasps her hands behind her back. "I mean, as much as I don't like sharing my victories with other people, well, I must actually *thank* Ouma for voting for the wrong person during Gonta's trial. If the votes had actually been split then who knows who Monokuma would've said was the correct culprit."

She's pushing him. She's going to push him over the edge again.

He made a mistake. He made *one tiny* mistake. He was so out of it that his fingers slipped and he clicked on the wrong person. His vote was definitely meant to go to Tsumugi but he had been in so much pain, his vision had been so blurred...

Ryoma grabs his hand and squeezes tight, grounding him. "Don't listen to her, kid."

"But he did vote wrong!" Tsumugi presses. "So the only person responsible in this room for Gonta's death is him-"

"You're wrong," Ryoma argues. "I know without a doubt that you're the one who killed Angie and you're the one who set Gonta up. I should've known someone as kind as Gonta would've never done such a horrible thing."

"Hmm? Is that what Ouma told you?" Tsumugi asks as the corner of her lips turn upwards. "Did he also tell you that he didn't even try to stop me from killing Angie? He just laid there-"

"Because you stabbed him first," Ryoma says firmly. "It doesn't take a genius to figure out what happened, Shirogane. Nice try but do you seriously think any of us are going to take to heart what you're saying?"

"S-So Monokuma seriously just fucking...let Shirogane get away with murder?" Miu trembles timidly. "What the hell? That's..."

"Well none of you were going to start killing each other any time soon so of course I had to step in," Tsumugi responds dismissively as she examines her fingernails. "And Monokuma wasn't about to let me die so soon, he needed me around just in case he broke and needed a spare."

"You're acting like you did us a favour," Ryoma spits.

"I mean, Monokuma didn't mind the idea of shredding you all into pieces but that would've been so *boring*," Tsumugi whines. "Besides, Gonta was an idiot anyway. He wouldn't have lasted long so-"

"You really are just a vile piece of work, aren't you?" Ryoma glares at her, clearly irritated. "You really don't care that you've caused so many people to die, do you?"

"Hmm, not really," Tsumugi answers with a soft laugh. "I mean, I didn't host a killing game just to watch everyone get along with each other. That would've been, like, super lame."

Kokichi squeezes Ryoma's hand and the tennis player almost jumps, forgetting that they were still both holding hands. "Hoshi, there really is no point in arguing with someone like her. You'll never win."

"Oh! So you finally figured that out for yourself, Ouma?" Tsumugi grins before turning her attention to the other two people in the room. "He's right, you know? No matter which angle you look at it, I can't possibly lose in this situation! As long as I get to feel and spread despair...I'll always be the winner."

She looks proud of herself. Tsumugi puts a hand on her hip and points at the trio with a sneer.

"This game might've started out as both mine and Monokuma's but since he's not around anymore I'll just have to take control!" Tsumugi declares. "Besides, Junko Enoshima never needed Monokuma to end her final class trial anyway! He was nothing but a mascot in the first place!"

"...hah?" Miu pulls a face as she crouches down and asks Ryoma and Kokichi quietly, "who the fuck is Junky Emoshitter?"

"It's Junko Enoshima!" Tsumugi shrieks defensively, causing Miu to recoil and let out a loud squeak. "She's...she's my *everything*! My entire world! She's the reason why this game is even

happening in the first place!”

Drool trickles down the cosplayer’s face as she unabashedly clasps her hands by her chest, eyes sparkling with admiration. She takes a step forward and her shoe lands in the pool of blood on the floor. Tsumugi, however, doesn’t seem to care.

“She’s the one who introduced me to despair,” Tsumugi says, as if starting a story. “Everything seemed so bleak before I saw her for the first time. It was like the world had no colour. Then I saw her for the first time and everything just felt right-”

“Shirogane, quite frankly none of us actually care,” Ryoma tells her.

Tsumugi scowls at him before clearing her throat. “-*anyway*, after seeing her handle herself so confidently during her own class trial-”

“Should we just...go break down the wall?” Miu suggests. “Like, is anything she’s saying actually relevant? I don’t think I even know a Junko Enoshima in the first place.”

“*Shut up!*” Tsumugi screams and Miu yelps once again. “I’m *trying* to talk!”

“As far as we’re concerned, you’re simply talking nonsense,” Ryoma tells her. “None of us care about your beloved Junko Enoshima, we don’t even know who she is. Even if she’s the reason why you’re hosting this killing game in the first place, that doesn’t excuse what you’ve put us all through. If you think we’re just going to stand around and listen to you drivel on about some girl we, to put it bluntly, don’t give a shit about then you’re more delusional than I initially thought.”

Tsumugi’s expression hardens as she says, “*what* did you just say?”

“No one gives a fuck about your villain origin story or whatever the actual hell you’re rambling on about,” Miu answers.

Tsumugi lets out a dangerous laugh. “Iruma, seriously, shut up. I can talk about whatever I want because this is my game and I’m not letting another thing go wrong! Whilst this entire game has been a mess from the very start, I’m at least getting the ending I deserve.”

“I don’t care what you want,” Ryoma says before angrily pointing at the press. “I want to know what the hell you think you’re playing at.”

“Oh? You want to talk about Momota?” Tsumugi hums. “The same person you left all alone with me, the mastermind of this killing game? Did you honestly think things were going to end well for him? God, you should’ve heard how pathetic he sounded whilst he was dying, it was so embarrassing!”

Ryoma growls lowly. “I want to talk *without* the extra embellishments-”

Tsumugi cackles as she puts a hand to her forehead, dramatically throwing her head to the side as she says in a mockingly gruff voice, “Hoshi, Ouma, where are you both? Guys, I need to talk to you both! I don’t think...*I don’t think I’m going to make it!*”

Kokichi’s stomach drops as Tsumugi continues her offensive mimicry of Kaito. He feels Ryoma freeze next to him.

The cosplayer squeals with delight before letting out a couple of fake coughs. “Everything hurts! *Everything hurts so bad!* My lungs are burning so much...guys I really think this is it for me! *For the love of God, someone put me out of my misery!*”

Tsumugi laughs as if she's just told the funniest joke in the world, resting her hands on her knees as she tries to catch her breath. Her little performance has caused a mess of bloody footprints everywhere.

"What the fuck..." Miu stumbles backwards. "You're...you're actually insane!"

"He died all alone in that bathroom over there," Tsumugi cruelly reveals, pointing her finger over at the bathroom door. "He thought you were all going to come back for him and no one did. Momota died all by himself because you all left him in that bathroom to *rot*."

Ryoma's expression darkens as he wordlessly pulls his hat further down his face.

"He wouldn't have had to die alone if you didn't gatekeep the fucking hangar like an absolute lunatic, you stupid bitch," Miu hisses. "And why the hell did you go out of your way to crush him?! You're actually batshit insane, aren't you? You didn't have to-"

"Why are you the one lecturing me? You and Momota were never friends," Tsumugi points out. "If anything, shouldn't you be yelling at me for what I did to Kiibo? He wouldn't be dead if it wasn't for me."

Miu's breath catches in her throat. "Yeah, well-"

"He didn't die right away, you know?" Tsumugi twists the metaphorical knife harshly and Miu goes rigid. "He kept asking for you, saying that he knew you could fix him. I just thought it would be a little unfair if cheated death so, well, all I had to do was snip a couple of wires and-"

"You..." Miu shakes her head before licking her lips. "*You*..."

"Aren't you all filled with hatred?" Tsumugi asks expectantly, a proud smile on her face. "Don't you all hate me so much? You should use that hatred to kill me, to get justice for everyone. I killed Angie without a second thought. I laughed myself to sleep after Gonta's trial. I left Kiibo to die with no regrets. I wrote Shinguji's instruction knowing *exactly* who he would target."

It's tempting, it's so, so tempting. Kokichi bites down hard on his tongue to stop himself from screaming back at her but to also feel something too. Anything. It's like she's holding him head down into a stream of icy water, suffocating him with her venomous words.

"Letting me leave this game would be too kind, you know?" Tsumugi tells them with a knowing smile on her face, her eyes twinkling. "Absolutely no one is going to think differently of any of you for giving up now. Sure, a couple of sacrifices would've been for nothing but-"

"Enough..." Kokichi mumbles tiredly, running his hands down his face. "Shirogane...enough already."

"But I'm only getting started!" Tsumugi suddenly snatches up his shoulders and spins him so he's facing the hydraulic press. She giggles warmly as her blue hair trickles over his shoulders, her breath tickling his cheek. "Look at what I've done, Ouma. *Look*. Letting me get away with this would be a crime itself." Her tone turns condescending as she juts her bottom lip out. "I know, *I know* you've tried your best to beat me but you don't have to try so hard anymore. You've already experienced what real despair feels like once already." She wraps their fingers together. "And I can see the hopeless look in your eye. Go on, *give in*. Give into despair."

"Get your hands off him." Ryoma roughly knocks her out of the way and Kokichi is abruptly turned away from the press. "And keep your mouth shut."

“Ooh, looks like someone is grouchy,” Tsumugi teases. “Y’know, I never really pictured the two of you as friends. Well, to be honest, Hoshi, I never really pictured you having *any* friends at all. I thought you’d never even make it this far.”

“Yeah, well, I did,” Ryoma huffs. “You do realise that nothing you can say is going to-”

“Hurt you? Upset you?” Tsumugi shrugs. “Because I’m a big scary monster who only spews poison, right? Of course you’re going to tell me to my face that you’re not taking anything I say to heart. However, we both know that’s just a lie. There’s only so long someone can keep a brave face on before they eventually crack.”

“I’ve had enough of this,” Miu grumbles. “Let’s just grab her and go-”

“Do you seriously think I’m just going to let you all walk out of here without giving me what I want first?” Tsumugi asks before sighing. “It’s not like I’m asking for much-”

“You’re asking us to kill you,” Ryoma snaps. “You couldn’t ask us for a worse thing.”

“I mean...” Tsumugi looks to the side with a thoughtful look on her face. “I could be demanding that one of you die with me to even the numbers out but...I’d rather not push my luck.”

“Shirogane, no one in this room is going to kill you,” Ryoma tells her firmly. “You’re leaving and that’s final.”

“But why?” Tsumugi complains almost childishly, stomping her feet on the ground. “I don’t get it! Are you trying to teach me some sort of lesson? That the power of friendship can solve everything? I doubt you want to keep me alive out of mercy-”

“Oh believe me, if I could wring your goddamn neck right now then I would,” Miu threatens.

“Then go ahead!” Tsumugi offers brightly, tilting her head to the side so her pale neck is on display. “Do it!”

Ryoma clicks his tongue. “Tch. *Pathetic.*”

“Excuse me?” Tsumugi blinks before straightening her posture. “What’s pathetic is that you’re all seriously just going to let everyone’s deaths be in vain! Seriously, every single death here is going to end up being pointless if you all let me walk away from this.”

“The only reason everyone here died a pointless death is because *you* killed them,” Ryoma says. “You didn’t have to start the killing game. You didn’t have to force a game that was never meant to happen.”

“Force a game that was never meant to happen...” Tsumugi murmurs into her hand before raising an eyebrow. “Oh? So you know we’re just in a simulation?”

“And we know there’s some sort of glitch,” Miu adds. “That’s forcing everyone who dies to wake up here over and over again. We figured that shit out ages ago.”

“O-Oh! I see!” Tsumugi falters before hiding her momentary lapse of confidence with a smile. “Well since you all know that we’re in a simulation then does it truly matter if I live or die at this point-”

“It does,” Kokichi says.

“Like hell are we letting you force another unneeded killing game,” Ryoma expands. “If you want to be punished so bad then consider leaving this game your punishment.”

“B-But...” Tsumugi’s face is an amalgamation of horror and glee as lets out sporadic giggles. “That’s not how it’s supposed to go...I’m supposed to die...Junko Enoshima died at the end of her game so...she experienced the most delicious despair in the world...kicking me out of my own game...that would be...”

“Dude, has she been like this the entire time?” Miu asks quietly.

Kokichi nods bitterly, smiling tightly as Ryoma squeezes his arm sympathetically. “There’s really no winning against her. She just twists everything to her advantage.”

“She’s got a real obsession with despair,” Ryoma murmurs. “And with whoever the hell Enoshima is.”

“I think she likes to dress up as her when no one is around,” Kokichi says. “At least, I think that’s who she was dressed up as when she...”

“So is Enoshima a person or some fictional character from one of her shitty shows or something?” Miu asks.

Ryoma shrugs. “Honestly, does it really matter at this point? It’s painfully obvious that all she wants to do is to copy this Enoshima person and feel the same despair as she did. I really don’t understand what’s going on myself but what’s important right now is getting her out of this simulation.”

Kokichi wavers as he looks past the tennis player to stare at the hydraulic press. “...right.”

Ryoma squeezes his arm again when he realises what he’s looking at. “She really is a nasty piece of work, isn’t she? You’re...doing well, Ouma. I know I certainly wasn’t expecting to walk in on such a sight.”

“...it’s just...all of this feels like overkill,” Kokichi admits resentfully. “Nothing is ever going to be enough for her. She didn’t have to crush Momota...finding his body intact would’ve just been as...”

“I know, I know,” Ryoma murmurs. He pinches the bridge of his nose with a weary sigh. “I... shouldn’t have fallen asleep, I should’ve checked on him more often. Still don’t really get why Shirogane did what she did but...”

“I found out you all had been lying to me, *duh!*” Tsumugi barges in on their conversation eagerly, eyes twirling as she uses Miu’s arms as a crutch to catch herself as she all but forces her way into their small circle. “You didn’t think I was going to stay in the hangar forever, right? You told me you were looking for Monokuma and I ended up finding you napping with the same person you told me you thought was the mastermind!”

Ryoma clicks his tongue. “You still had no need to crush Momota’s body. You only did that to get a reaction out of us.”

“And it’s working,” Tsumugi sings playfully. “None of you can even look me in the eye!”

“Are you still fucking rambling on?” Miu groans. “Go find something to shove into your mouth-”

“The bigger the better, right?” Tsumugi rolls her eyes. “You’re so predictable.”

“You really are asking for a slap, aren’t you?” Miu hisses. “Killing you might not be an option but I can still *kick your ass*-”

“Killing me is the only option I’m giving you guys!” Tsumugi responds. “No one is leaving this room until I’m dead! C’mon, you guys. I’ve given you all plenty of reasons as to why you should kill me.”

“And despite that, none of us are hurting you and that’s that,” Ryoma firmly tells her. “The only option we’re all giving you is to leave this game with us. Either you leave the hangar willingly or we’ll drag you out kicking and screaming.”

Tsumugi glares at him. “Oh look at me, I’m Ryoma Hoshi and just because *one* person decided to give me the time of day I now think I’m better than everyone else. If things were different, you’d be dead right now. All of you would be dead. And I wouldn’t have to put up with...with this *bullshit*.”

“Honestly, that just sounds like a you problem,” Ryoma says. “We’re all alive whether you like it or not so deal with it.”

Tsumugi lets out a loud snort. “Oh wow, you certainly have grown a lot throughout this killing game, haven’t you? What happened to the pathetic version of you who just wanted to die? He’d be so much easier to deal with right now.”

“He no longer exists,” Ryoma growls. “You’re stuck with me now so get used to it.”

“Ooh, how *defiant*!” Tsumugi coos. “Buuut it seems we’ve come to some sort of standstill. I want to end the game my way and you guys want to end the game your way. Hmm...what to do...”

“Quit fucking around!” Miu harshly shoves Tsumugi’s shoulder. “Or else I’m seriously going to lose my patience!”

“Iruma,” Ryoma murmurs warningly. “We don’t want to hurt her, remember?”

“Oh no, I quite welcome this sort of behaviour,” Tsumugi says. “I knew if I kept pushing then one of you would snap eventually. I seriously thought for one second I was going to have to start grovelling on my knees but this is fine too!”

“You’re acting like I’m going to give you what you want,” Miu snarls. “Fuck that. I’m dragging you out of here-”

“No you’re not!” Tsumugi darts away from them, backing away towards the control panel. “Okay, *fine*! Forget the discussion! Forget having some sort of class trial! We don’t have to do any of that since you all clearly know what’s going on! Let’s just skip to punishing me-”

“And we said we’re not hurting you,” Ryoma says.

“But you have to!” Tsumugi screams impatiently. Her eyes go wide with desperation, a snarl present on her face. “Seriously, what the hell is wrong with all of you?! I’ve...I’ve dragged you all through hell! I forced a game that was never meant to happen! At least one of you should want me dead!”

“It’s just a shame we all want you alive more than we want you dead,” Ryoma tells her. “So-”

“I lied about Momota!” Tsumugi suddenly spits. “He didn’t die in the bathroom alone. *I killed him*.”

Ryoma freezes. "...*what?*"

"He never died because of his illness," Tsumugi continues. "He just wouldn't stop coughing and spluttering and making so much noise...it was really getting on my nerves! He just wouldn't shut up and I was about to leave to find Monokuma myself when I got this excellent idea. I knew something wasn't right and I knew you'd all find a way to break in here eventually so I thought oh, wouldn't it be nice if they had something super despairing to walk in on?"

"No...you're *lying*," Ryoma insists. "You-"

"If only Ouma hadn't tried to take something so precious of mine," Tsumugi says. "I wouldn't have been forced to take something so precious from you all in retaliation."

"...you killed Momota because...I said...I was the mastermind of the killing game?" Kokichi asks faintly. He feels his heart start to thump wildly in his chest. The corners of his vision start to darken.

Too much. This is just *too much*. Excessive. Needless. It's overkill.

Tsumugi's words must've gotten to Ryoma as he doesn't squeeze his arm again this time. The tennis player instead stares at the floor with a murderous look in his eyes. His leather jacket trembles along with his fists.

"That's right," Tsumugi answers. "He might've made it to the end of the game if it wasn't for you. So many people could've. In a way, I should be thanking you for allowing this game to happen in the first place."

Too much. Toomuch. *Toomuchtoomuchtoomuch*.

"The only person responsible for this game is you," Miu hisses. "Quit trying to start shit-"

"I'm only saying what needs to be said," Tsumugi insists. "I'm just trying to prove to you all how pointless it is to keep me alive. I deserve to die and you all know that's the truth. A game of Danganronpa only ends when the villain is punished."

"Dangan...ronpa?" Kokichi echoes slowly.

"Yes, that's the name of this game we're playing," Tsumugi says before waving a dismissive hand at him. "Danganronpa is a battle between hope and despair!"

"And let me guess, the villain always roots for despair to win?" Miu asks.

Tsumugi nods eagerly. "And you guys have to prove me wrong with the power of hope! Well, unless you all want to succumb to despair instead. That's also a valid choice-"

"...screw your hope," Ryoma mutters.

"Huh?" Tsumugi blinks before clapping her hands together. "Oh, so you're going to take the side of despair then-"

"And screw your despair," Ryoma continues.

That shuts Tsumugi up. Her mouth opens and closes as if she was a fish out of water.

"Don't know much about this game or why you're so obsessed with it," Ryoma says. "But I do know that I don't want to listen to you talk anymore. Hope? Despair? Why would I want to devote

my entire life to just ever experiencing just one of those things?”

“Because-”

“*Shut up*, I don’t want to hear it.” The tennis player sighs loudly. “You can wallow in your stupid despair all you want, Shirogane. That’s your choice. You’re sorely mistaken if you think I’m just going to let you let everyone fall down into the same dark pits you’re in though. Doesn’t mean I’m going to let everyone be blinded by hope either.”

“B-But Danganronpa...is about picking between hope and despair,” Tsumugi responds. “It... always has been so-”

“Shirogane, is what we’re playing right now even a game of Danganronpa?” Ryoma asks. “You even said it yourself, you forced this game to happen. Are you that desperate to feel something? Just, what are you even trying to accomplish?”

“I...” Tsumugi looks down at the floor silently. “I just want to feel the same despair Junko Enoshima did.”

“Un-fucking-believable,” Miu groans. “You and your fucking *despair*.”

Kokichi pauses before saying, “I think we’re done here.”

“What?” Tsumugi puts a hand to her chest. “You’re not *serious*, are you?! W-What about everyone who has died, everyone I’ve killed-”

“They’ll find out about you one day,” Ryoma says. “And they’ll all think we’re doing the right thing by forcing you out of this game. That’s what I believe.”

“That’s what you...” Tsumugi’s face goes blank before her eyes fill with rage. “You’re *not* supposed to be this optimistic! You’re supposed to be a pitiful, lonely tennis player with no friends! No one was supposed to reach out to you! You should’ve died ages ago-”

“We’re not listening to you anymore,” Kokichi tells her.

Tsumugi grinds her teeth together before snarling out, “don’t you dare act like you’re the bigger person here! I’m not wrong when I said you could’ve ended this game ages ago! You’ve got just as blood on your hands as I do, Ouma!”

“At least I regret keeping quiet,” Kokichi says. “You’re not sorry for anything, are you?”

“I’ve literally told you all you can kill me to avenge everyone!” Tsumugi retorts.

“What? Do you want a fucking medal or something?” Miu rolls her eyes. “A round of applause? You asked us to punish you and we are by forcing you to leave this game.”

“B-But...that’s not how it’s supposed to work!” Tsumugi cries. “It’s not-”

“Shirogane, it’s over,” Ryoma says. “Your game of Danganronpa? It’s finished.”

“It’s not...it’s not!” Tsumugi trembles as she backs away like a cornered animal, hugging her arms tightly. Her eyes go wide with a sudden realisation and she reaches into her blazer pocket and pulls out a bloody knife. “*It’s not!*”

“What the fuck?!” Miu takes a step back whilst Ryoma instinctively stands in front of his friends. Kokichi stares at the knife curiously. “Why the *fuck* does she have a knife?! Has she been carrying

it around with her this whole time?!”

“It looks like a knife from the kitchen,” Ryoma says.

“It’s covered in blood,” Kokichi points out quietly. “...whose blood is it?”

“Momota’s obviously,” Miu answers with a huff. “I bet that’s what she used to kill him.”

Tsumugi ignores their conversation and with shaky hands, starts to walk forwards with the knife, holding it out for someone to take. “C’mon, someone take it. I know deep down one of you wants to really kill me. This is your chance.”

“Keep that thing away from me!” Miu squeals and takes another step back.

“C’mon, please...*please*...” Tsumugi lands heavily on her knees as she holds the knife out towards the trio, making sure that the handle is facing them and that the blade is pointed towards her face. “This is the only way I deserve to leave this game-”

“Put that away, Shirogane,” Ryoma sighs as he pushes his hands deep into his pockets. “And get up from the floor. You’re being stupid.”

Tsumugi ignores him and grabs Kokichi's shirt, pressing the knife against his hand desperately. “C’mon, Ouma. Don’t you want to make it up to everyone? To Angie and Gonta? To Kiibo? To Chabashira, Tojo and Shinguji? To Momota? You’ve got no other choice but to kill me and that’s the truth.”

The blade is cold against his hand. Kokichi simply lets Tsumugi fruitlessly press the flat side of the blade against him over and over again. His hand remains limp by his side. Even though his fight or flight instincts are kicking in, screaming at him to push Tsumugi as far away as possible, he simply looks down at her blankly as she tries to make him hold the knife.

“Please, please, please...” Tsumugi mutters under her breath, fighting with Kokichi’s fingers, trying to uncurl them. “It won’t mean as much if I just kill myself. It has to be one of you who kills me. You have to *punish* me. You have to *defeat* me.”

She forces Kokichi’s fingers open and presses the handle against his hand.

“Kill me,” Tsumugi begs.

Kokichi pauses as he wraps his hands around the knife and looks at it with an unreadable expression. Tsumugi’s eyes widen with desperation and she watches the knife silently as she mumbles a series of *please, please, please* under her breath.

He looks at Tsumugi and then at the knife. “No.”

Kokichi throws the knife into a random corner of the room and watches as Tsumugi’s expression dissolves into one of horror. Her grip tightens on his shirt and for a second, everyone is still. Then, Tsumugi lunges and Kokichi yelps as he’s pushed onto his back. The cosplayer is oozing with unfathomable hatred as she reaches for his neck, a bloodthirsty look in her eyes.

“*You need to take responsibility!*” Tsumugi screams. She doesn’t even manage to wrap a single hand around his neck before both Ryoma and Miu grab her arms. “You *all* need to take responsibility! You all need to end this game properly-”

“Shirogane, get off him,” Ryoma grunts as he pulls hard on her arm.

Tsumugi shakes her head as a loud sob escapes from her. “Get off me! This isn’t how it’s supposed to end!”

“Tough...tough shit!” Miu pants as Tsumugi starts to thrash. “We don’t care how things are supposed to go! You’re leaving the goddamn simulation whether you like it or not! I’m not giving you the fucking chance to hurt Kiibo again!”

“Oh I’ll do much more than hurt him next time I see him,” Tsumugi threatens. “Because once I die and wake up here again-”

“Shirogane, seriously, *enough*,” Ryoma sighs.

Kokichi scrambles from underneath her as Ryoma and Miu pull her far away enough for him to move. When he looks at Tsumugi, he can’t help but think of a trapped, wild animal. She’s gone completely off the deep end and he doubts there’s a single way to make her see reason.

He tilts his head curiously when he suddenly notices that one of Tsumugi’s blazer sleeves is darker than the other, drenched in something he can’t figure out. As Ryoma and Miu struggle to hold her back, Kokichi pauses before reaching over to grab her sleeve and pulls it down.

Even Ryoma makes a sympathetic noise as he notices the horrific wound trailing along Tsumugi’s wrist. Due to how dark her blazer is, it was rather hard to notice that her sleeve was soaked with blood.

“Christ...” Ryoma sucks in a breath. “Does anyone have anything we can use to wrap around that?”

Tsumugi defensively hugs her injured arm to her chest and suddenly stops struggling, shuffling backwards quickly. “*Don’t touch me.*”

Despite how hard she is trying to hide her injury, it’s still obvious that it looks like it’s been picked at, as if Tsumugi has dragged her fingers across it several times. Kokichi stares hard at her for a moment when something else catches his eye. Whilst it looks like she’s washed her hands, blood isn’t the easiest thing to wash away. Her fingertips have faded pink smears on them. Has...she been rubbing her blood onto something?

The only thing in this room that is covered in blood is...

Kokichi looks at the hydraulic press once more. It’s still such a horrific sight to look at and even though there is plenty of pink dripping down the sides of it, upon closer inspection it looks like some of the smears on the press have been caused by someone dragging their hands across it. But...why? It wouldn’t make sense for Tsumugi to use the press itself to clean her hands with, especially since there’s a sink in the bathroom.

...what is she hiding?

Kaito’s jacket sleeve catches his attention once more and he stares at the lonely purple sleeve. The only reason why everyone in this room thinks Kaito’s under there is because of the sleeve. It’s undeniable that a body has definitely been crushed under the press, there’s too much evidence to suggest otherwise.

“What’s wrong?” Ryoma asks as he searches the room for something to wrap Tsumugi’s wrist with.

“...I...” Kokichi murmurs as he studies Kaito’s sleeve.

“Why do you want my sleeve hanging out from the press?”

“To confuse everyone, duh. To make them think that you’re under it.”

“B-But that’ll...I don’t want my sidekicks to think I’m dead!”

“Momota, the whole point of my plan is to make it so even Monokuma can’t figure out who is under the press. Stop being such a baby.”

“But-”

“Oh quit whining. You’re acting like you’re the one who is going to be crushed. It’s my body that’s going to be squashed, you stupid oaf. All you have to do is sit pretty inside of the-”

Kokichi blinks, putting a hand to his head with a dazed look in his eyes. What was that? A lost memory? His imagination? It’s not the first time he’s heard a phantom conversation before...

He looks over his shoulders at the five Exisals behind him. Blue. Yellow. Red. Pink. Green. He then makes a choked noise as he realises something. Four Exisals are wide open. The middle one, the red one, is *closed*.

“Ouma?” Ryoma calls out to him but Kokichi doesn’t hear him as he springs up from the floor and stands in front of the red Exisal, biting down on his thumb as his eyes roam over the machine.

“What...What are you doing?” Tsumugi suddenly asks. “Don’t go near that.”

“Why?” Miu responds curiously.

Kokichi ignores the conversation behind him and chews desperately on the skin around his nail until he spots a lever near the bottom of the Exisal. He grabs it with both hands and tugs down on it hard, eyes going wide as he hears the sound of the Exisal opening with a hiss. The latch opens and...

...and he sees Kaito sitting inside.

“...Momota?” Ryoma abruptly stops searching as Kokichi starts to climb the Exisal with unrestrained urgency, the leader ignoring how his entire body aches at his abrupt movements.

Kaito is slouched forward, still as a statue. Kokichi crawls onto his lap, ignoring Tsumugi’s pleas for him to get out of the Exisal. Straight away Kokichi notices how different Kaito looks without his trademark purple jacket. He’s still wearing his thin white jacket but it doesn’t do much to help fight against the cold.

To say that Kaito looks dreadful is an understatement. He looks like a corpse and for a moment, Kokichi worries that he is. He silently presses his head against the astronaut’s chest, lips wobbling as he waits.

A choked out sound of relief escapes from him as he hears a faint heartbeat. It’s slow and worryingly weak but it’s *there*. Kaito’s heart is beating. He’s *alive*. Kokichi swallows heavily, tears stinging his eyes as he wraps his arms around the astronaut’s chest and holds him tight.

Kokichi catches Ryoma staring at him helplessly and the leader offers him a wobbly smile. *“He’s alive.”*

Ryoma looks like he’s about to fall to his knees. “...thank God.”

“He’s been in there the whole time?” Miu asks with a confused frown. “Hah? What the actual fuck is going on here?”

She turns to Tsumugi expectantly. The cosplayer simply stares at the Exisal with a faraway look in her eyes.

Ryoma, however, clearly wants answers. “Shirogane, explain yourself. *Now*. What the hell do you actually think you’re playing at?”

“...you can’t crush someone who is alive,” Tsumugi says quietly. “And...I thought...I thought it would be even more despairing if I didn’t tell you until the last second that he was alive...you were all supposed to kill me and I was going to tell you all he was in the Exisal and...you were all supposed to find him too late...”

Kokichi’s hands tremble as he continues to listen to the faint thump, thump, thumping of Kaito’s heartbeat. He doesn’t care that he looks like a mess right now, that he is clinging to Kaito like a child. All of that doesn’t matter. All he cares about at the moment is listening to the faint but unwavering sound of Kaito’s heart beating, listening to the proof that Kaito is alive.

“For goodness sake, Shirogane,” Ryoma spits, his voice a mixture of annoyed and exasperated.

“I...just wanted you all to feel the same despair I feel,” Tsumugi says. “So...”

“You screwed yourself over,” Kokichi tells her, causing the cosplayer to jump. She looks up at him silently. “You’ve been so desperate to cause despair that you got sloppy. There is such a thing called overkill, you know?”

“Oh shut up, Ouma,” Tsumugi grumbles. “Just because Momota is alive now doesn’t mean he’s going to last much longer. Just look at him!”

Kokichi scowls at her. He knows Kaito looks awful, that his skin is borderline grey. He can hear every sharp breath Kaito takes and can also hear how Kaito’s chest rattles. The astronaut is basically at death’s door but until he’s actually dead, Kokichi knows he has something he can work with.

Besides, Kaito said he wanted to train with everyone again. Kokichi does too.

“Momota?” Kokichi carefully shakes the astronaut’s shoulder. Kaito groans. “Momota, wake up.”

Then, to Kokichi’s disbelief, Kaito turns his head to the side and mumbles out, “ugh, just five more minutes.”

Miu fails to hold back a snort and even Ryoma looks vaguely amused as Kokichi blinks. The leader pouts and shakes Kaito’s shoulder again. “*No*, you’re *not* getting five more minutes. Open your eyes now, Momota.”

Kaito groans and something in Kokichi’s chest flutters as Kaito slowly starts to open his eyes, blinking slowly as Kokichi makes sure he doesn’t end up slumping out of his seat by holding his shoulders. “...’kichi?”

Neither of them say a word as they silently look at each other. If someone had told Kokichi at the start of the game that he would end up almost weeping tears of relief because he saw Kaito looking at him as if he’s just laid every single star in the star at his feet then he would’ve laughed in their face. Kokichi basks in the moment of peace until Kaito inevitably shatters it once he realises that Kokichi is literally curled up on his lap.

“What the hell is going on?” Kaito asks. “I thought...why aren’t I in the bathroom?” He looks over Kokichi’s shoulder and his eyes go wide when he spots the hydraulic press. “*Who-*”

“No one else has died, Momota,” Ryoma tells him as he makes his way over to the Exisal. “Shirogane just...wanted us to think that you were dead.”

“But...” Kaito blinks. “Who...”

Tsumugi sighs disappointedly. “Because of what happened after Shinguji’s trial, neither Monokuma or I had the time to clean up Tojo and Chabashira so...”

“So you crushed them?!” Miu shouts. “And made us think Momota was under there this entire time?! You seriously are twisted.”

“And you used your own blood to make everything look even more realistic,” Ryoma realises. He shakes his head with a disgruntled sigh, tugging on his hat. “What the hell...”

“I did it for...” Tsumugi looks down at the floor with a sad sigh, “despair.”

The same excuse, over and over again. Despair this. Despair that. It’s pathetic. Kokichi silently squeezes Kaito’s shoulders gently before he climbs down from the Exisal and picks up the gun that Miu had to put on the floor when Tsumugi had jumped on him.

“Where...are you going?” Kaito asks.

“I’m going to break the wall down,” Kokichi tells him. “And I’m putting a stop to this game.”

“W-Wait!” Tsumugi pulls herself up from the floor quickly. “But-”

“Shirogane, before you told us to take responsibility for our actions,” Kokichi says. “But the only person who needs to take responsibility is you. I really, *really* don’t care that you want to end your game with you dying. I didn’t put up with your bullshit for this long just to let you take the easy way out.”

“But I-”

“Hoshi? Iruma? Can you both apprehend her so she can be brought outside?” Kokichi asks. “I’ll take the wall down to make getting her out of this game quicker.”

Ryoma nods. “Yeah, we can do that.”

“Guess I can help,” Miu grumbles, thankfully realising that apprehending Tsumugi is most definitely more than a one person job.

Kokichi smiles before turning to Kaito, who is still sitting inside of the Exisal. “Momota, you just sit there and look pretty, okay?”

“*Hah?*” Kaito pouts. “But-”

“You’re making a mistake!” Tsumugi screeches. “You can’t end the game this way! You can’t!”

Kokichi sighs and shoots Tsumugi a flat look that causes her to freeze. “*I can and I will.*”

He turns her back on her and walks away as she screams bloody murder. He’s aware that she’s calling him every name under the sun, cursing him as loud as she can. Kokichi, however, ignores her and walks out of the hangar wordlessly.

(Even though he's left everyone else behind, it doesn't feel like he's alone. If this was a scene from fiction then he could very easily imagine Gonta and Angie waiting for him at the end of the hallway. Korekiyo and Kirumi would be walking just a little ahead from him whilst Kiibo and Tenko would be by his side. Tenko would probably smile at him proudly and he'd smile back.)

Kokichi vaguely hears someone calling his name and presumes it's just Tsumugi screaming at him again. He leaves the hangar and steps outside. Straight away he notices that a false sun is starting to rise. The sky is a mixture of blue and yellow blurred together peacefully. He takes a deep breath through his nose and sighs.

The crack is still there when he reaches it and for a moment he simply admires it. Well, this is it then. He's finally found a way to leave hell. It...it took a lot of people to get here, so much death and misery. Kokichi hopes that dragging Tsumugi out of hell with him is a big enough apology for everyone he's let down.

He powers up the gun and aims it at the crack.

This...is really it. In just a moment, all of this will be over.

He presses his finger against the trigger and swallows. Once everyone leaves this game then another one will start. It's a cold comfort but...at least everyone won't have to deal with Tsumugi and Monokuma. No one will...know what he had to go through to secure them safety but...he's okay with that. He's a leader, it's his job to keep his people safe.

Kokichi takes a deep breath before pressing down *hard* on the trigger.

The glass shatters and Kokichi shields his eyes as he sees pure white light fill in the hole he has just made. It's one of the most beautiful things he has ever seen. Kokichi watches it silently and instinctively wants to reach out to it, to step into the welcoming warm light when something catches his attention.

He hears the sound of glass splintering and everything happens at once. Despite Miu claiming she made a function that would make the gun safe to use, it was never a certain guarantee that only a *small* hole would be made. Kokichi snaps his head up as he watches a crack grow up the wall rapidly. The wall starts to splinter and tremble. He jumps as a large piece of glass lodges itself by his foot before another one lands in front of him, smashing into tiny pieces.

The exit is in front of him but with how quickly the glass is falling, running towards it at the moment would be suicide. He almost trips as he automatically starts to stumble backwards, keeping an eye on the glass wall that is slowly starting to cave in on itself. His ears ring with the sound of glass smashing and he heads back towards the stone path that leads towards Miu's lab and the hangar.

Another piece of glass lands uncomfortably close to him and with how suddenly it appeared, it ends up surprising him. His ankle rolls and he yelps as he trips, landing heavily onto the floor as the wall continues to break.

It's not as if the entire wall is falling but the hole is expanding upwards, growing higher and higher and taking as much glass as it can down with it. It's a miracle in itself that the entire wall isn't trying to fall on top of him but that doesn't mean he's in the clear. Yet another piece of glass lands mere inches from him and he covers his face with a single arm as he uses his other to try and pull himself up.

Kokichi then makes the mistake of looking up and notices a large chunk of glass hurtling towards

him and for a moment he thinks oh, he isn't going to make it after all. He braces himself, squeezing his eyes shut as the sound of smashing glass confuses his ears. All the chaos surrounding him muffles out the noise of something slamming against the floor like loud footsteps.

One moment a piece of glass is flying towards him. The next moment he's being tackled by a large piece of machinery and Kokichi gasps as he's suddenly somewhat shielded. He ends up on his side, his breathing heavy as static fills his ears. At some point the glass must stop falling and the hole stops growing. Kokichi simply lies on the floor with his eyes blown wide open, swapping out his heavy breathing for shallow breaths.

He misses the sound of the machine above him opening, the red Exisal latch opening once more. His back is turned to it. As the static starts to dissipate, he hears someone grunting as they crawl over to him. Kokichi simply lies there and *breathes* as he listens to someone call out his name over and over.

Then a hand grabs his shoulder and he's rolled onto his back. Kokichi blinks slowly as Kaito hovers over him with wide eyes. The astronaut's white jacket sleeves have little tears in them from where he had to pull himself over. He looks down at Kokichi with a very hard to decipher expression.

"Kokichi...kichi...*fuck*..." Kaito's hand tremors as he hesitantly pulls it away from his shoulder.

Kokichi blinks before breathing out slowly. "Momota?"

"We heard...the wall..." Kaito heaves out slowly, taking deep breaths in between each word. "Iruma didn't think...the gun would cause...so much damage."

Kokichi lets out a wheeze. "Yeah well..."

Kaito swallows, offering Kokichi a relieved smile as he says, "glad I...reached you in..."

"Ahaha..." Kokichi smiles helplessly as Kaito instantly goes quiet as the astronaut *finally* stops looking at Kokichi's face to look just a little further down. There's several pieces of glass lodged deep into his side and stomach. It's adrenaline alone that's numbing the pain but Kokichi knows it's only a matter of time before the pain hits him hard.

"Oh *shit*..." Panic quickly spreads across Kaito's face as he looks down at the glass embedded deep inside of Kokichi. For a moment Kokichi is convinced that Kaito is about to pull the glass out with his hands but he doesn't. "Kokichi, fuck...oh fuck..."

"I thought...the wall came down a little too easily," Kokichi says. "Usually things never go my way so *of course* I end up being impaled by the damn wall itself."

Kaito shakes his head, swearing under his breath as he looks down at Kokichi's stomach and then at the hole in the wall. He does seem surprised to see that instead of there being more land outside the wall, there's a bright white light. However, Kaito forces his surprise to the side and instead asks, "we just need...to get you outside of the wall, right?"

"Momota..." Kokichi grimaces as Kaito grabs his arm and hooks it around his shoulder. "Momota, just hold on a second-"

Kaito does not hold on for a second. Kokichi gasps as Kaito tries to pull him up from the floor. Kokichi can tell just from the look on Kaito's face that the astronaut is struggling, that it's taking literally *everything* out of him to even hold even the slightest of Kokichi's weight. Kaito grunts as he kneels onto one knee and Kokichi gasps as an inevitable stab of pain wracks his body as Kaito

tugs on him sloppily.

Kokichi doesn't know what hurts more, the glass inside of him or watching as Kaito desperately tries to pull both of them up single-handedly. Kokichi can feel how feverishly hot Kaito's skin is as the astronaut readjusts his grip on him. He tries to get his feet to cooperate so that Kaito isn't the only one trying to keep them both upright. He tries to pull himself to his knees but even that proves to be too difficult. His legs uselessly tremble as Kaito lets out a pained noise through his teeth, biting back a yell as he tries to stand them both up.

"M-Momota, *enough*-"

"W-We can...still make it!" Kaito talks over him. Kokichi's vision blurs as Kaito pulls on him a little too hard and the pained gasp he lets out is enough to make Kaito pause fretfully. "T-The exit...is right there!"

Blood thumps through his ears as Kaito shakily manages to kneel upright on one leg. Sweat drips from his forehead and mixes in with the dried up blood on his face, causing pale pink drops of liquid to drip onto the floor. Kokichi grimaces as he accidentally ends up leaning a little too heavily into Kaito, wincing as Kaito almost drops them both. He's about to apologise when Kaito attempts to lift them both into a standing position.

They barely even last a second. The moment Kokichi lifts his head up, everything spins and for one terrifying moment, dark spots swallow his vision whole. He lurches forward and the only thing that stops him from pressing the glass further into his side and stomach is Kaito's hands catching him.

"Shit..." Kaito pulls him even closer and takes in a couple of deep breaths, psyching himself up. "C'mon Kaito, you're the Luminary of the Stars. You've got this! *You've...got this!*"

"Momota-" Kokichi winces as Kaito once again attempts to go from kneeling to standing. It's so hard to watch, especially since Kokichi knows that Kaito is just wasting precious energy by trying to pull the leader to his feet. "Momota, *please*, just stop it-"

"I can get us up this time!" Kaito insists and once again curls his leg that is not kneeling upwards so he can try to stand. "I...can do it..."

He can't. Kaito was barely able to even stand in the bathroom a couple of hours ago. It's delusional desperation that's fuelling him at this point and Kokichi knows that if this continues, one of them is going to get even more hurt. Kokichi bites back a pained sob as Kaito somehow manages to pull them both up slowly. Kaito wheezes noisily as he forces Kokichi to let him carry most of his weight.

Kaito only manages one step before falling back onto one knee. Kokichi winces as he's jostled, slumping against Kaito. He feels the glass inside of him move and for one horrifying second, he's convinced that he's about to throw up. Instead he puts a hand to his mouth and swallows heavily, taking deep breaths as his eyes burn.

"C'mon, one more try..." Kaito quickly tries to recover. Not wanting Kaito to have to do all of the heavy work, Kokichi grits his teeth and tries to force his legs to work. They feel heavy and wobbly and useless. He kicks up dust as his feet slip on the floor. He fights against the dark spots engulfing his vision, tries to push through the wave of dizziness that attacks him. Kokichi, however, is only human and every person has their limits.

Kaito fails once again to stand and his grip on Kokichi's arm weakens a little too much. Kokichi ends up falling to the floor and he's grateful that the Exisal is there for him to lean against. His

back slides down the side of the red machine and Kokichi gasps in air greedily as his entire body trembles.

Oh. So this is his limit, huh?

“H-Hey, c’mon. You’re not...giving up now, are you?” Kaito asks as he kneels in front of him. There’s something pleading in Kaito’s tone, something frantic. Even though Kaito is running on empty and is covered in his own blood, he’s *still* trying. He’s *still* fighting. “The exit...is right in front of us...”

“I know,” Kokichi says. Kokichi looks at the beautiful white light that’s just out of his reach and then at Kaito, who is on his knees. Kokichi’s body might have given up on him and he knows Kaito doesn’t have much left to give but...but Kaito is stronger than him. He’s *used* to fighting against his own body. It might be undignified but even though Kaito clearly can’t walk, Kokichi knows the astronaut still has enough energy left to drag himself to the exit with his arms. “Go.”

“...go?” Kaito blinks as Kokichi struggles to point at the hole in the wall.

“You...just need to get past the wall,” Kokichi tells him. “Then...then you’ll be out of the game.”

“But what about you?”

Kokichi laughs weakly. “Momota...does it look like I’m going anywhere any time soon?”

Kaito looks uncharacteristically lost as he looks at the hole in the wall and then back at Kokichi. They both know that Kokichi is bleeding out and that it’s only a matter of time before...

“I...I can try walk you to the exit again-”

Kokichi sighs with an exasperated smile. “Momota, I’m *done*. I...really don’t have anything else left to give.”

“But the exit...it’s right in front of us!”

“I know.” Kokichi looks at the white light tiredly before looking down at the glass inside of his stomach. “I know.”

He should be more upset than this. He should be screaming about how unfair all of this is. He should be hopelessly trying to drag himself over to the large hole in the wall even though he knows he won’t ever make it. He should be begging and pleading to anyone who might be listening to give him just a slither of energy to push on. He should be sobbing. He should be scared because death is just around the corner, waiting to greet him with open arms.

Instead, Kokichi simply looks at the large hole in the wall and realises that...he’s *satisfied*. He wanted to make a hole in the wall and he did. He’s secured everyone else an exit and...that’s enough for him.

Kaito looks at him with an unreadable expression before his face softens. Kokichi watches, perplexed as to why Kaito isn’t crawling away from him. Instead, Kaito lets out a loud sigh as he makes himself comfortable next to the small leader.

“Momota...what are you doing?” Kokichi asks. “You can still make it to the exit if you try...I know you can.”

“Yeah, I probably can,” Kaito agrees. “But...”

Kokichi shakes his head defiantly. “Momota, don’t you dare stay here with me.”

Kaito offers him a bittersweet smile. “Kichi, you’re not the only one struggling to move right now, you know?”

“B-But...you can still crawl-”

“Nah, I’m done,” Kaito says before letting out a loud cough. He presses his face into the crook of his arm. “Everyone else’s finishing line is somewhere behind the wall. Ours...can be right here.”

“No, *mine* is,” Kokichi insists harshly. “Momota, *move*-”

Kokichi’s breath catches in his throat as he finally looks at Kaito’s face. The light pouring from the hole in the wall gives the astronaut’s face an almost angelic glow as he smiles helplessly at Kokichi. The need to yell at Kaito to move instantly disappears because straight away, Kokichi spots the resigned look in Kaito’s eyes. Kaito’s at his limit too. It was unrealistic of Kokichi to think Kaito had enough fight left in him to crawl to the exit.

Kaito’s right. This really is their shared finishing line.

So instead of pleading for each other to press on, to ask for the impossible, they both quietly look at the hole in the wall together with their backs pressed against the red Exisal. Perhaps they both reached the same conclusion, knowing it would be cruel to beg for the other to continue ahead.

Kokichi watches with half lidded eyes as the white light beckons them both invitingly before flopping his head to the side to look at Kaito. They must’ve turned to face each other at the same time since he spots Kaito looking down at him.

“Hi.” Kokichi ends up saying.

Kaito smiles. “Hi.”

Dark dots dance around his vision, swirling and bobbing sporadically.

He’s dying.

A heavy lump forms in his throat at the realisation. Kokichi swallows before flinching as a warm hand holds his own, looping their fingers together. He looks down sluggishly at the hand holding his and then back up at Kaito.

“Your hand...is really sweaty.”

Kaito rolls his eyes. “So is yours.”

They both laugh as if they both just shared an inside joke with each other. Maybe it’s the blood loss that’s making Kokichi more mellow, more docile. His vision starts to blur again and the pain causes his body to seize. Kaito simply just squeezes his hand tight as he fights through the tremors.

Kokichi doesn’t know if it’s a blessing or not that Kaito is used to the pain that’s always wracking his body. He can tell that Kaito’s struggling since every so often, the astronaut will suddenly tighten his grip on his hand as another harsh cough forces it way from his mouth, causing blood to trickle from the sides of his lips.

“Hey Momota?” Kokichi suddenly asks as he rests his head on the astronaut’s shoulder. Kokichi feels...distant. The pain in his stomach is starting to numb. Everything is starting to look a little

darker, a little more blurry.

“Hmm?”

The world spins violently. Kokichi closes his eyes. “...next time we wake up here...I’d really...”

He feels like he’s getting further and further away from his body.

“...I’d really like it,” Kokichi says, “if you believed in me again.”

The truth is he doesn’t know what Kaito’s response is. The world blurs a little too much, his body shuts down a little too soon. The blood rushing in his ears starts to sound more and more distant as each second passes and...

...only the white light hears Kaito’s answer.

The very last thing Kokichi is aware of is Kaito’s hand holding his own and in a way it’s a relief. It means that they’re going to be hand in hand as they both step into the great unknown together, both acting as each other’s guides.

Kokichi...really likes the idea of that.

—

Ryoma grumbles as he sidesteps out of the way, sighing heavily as Tsumugi tries to kick him again.

Miu grunts as she tightens her hold on Tsumugi’s arms, which she’s holding behind the cosplayer’s back. It took a while to finally wrestle Tsumugi into submission. After the cosplayer heard the wall break, it’s like she purposefully went out of her way to be as awkward as possible.

“I’m *not*...leaving!” Tsumugi shrieks as Miu forcibly pushes her from the hangar. She looks around at all the glass on the floor with a sneer. “You still have time to kill me. Where did all that murderous energy you had before go?!”

“Will you keep fucking still?!” Miu mercilessly digs her fingers into Tsumugi’s arms. “Quit being a pain in the ass!”

Ryoma shakes his head disapprovingly at Tsumugi as she violently struggles. “We keep telling you, Shirogane. We’re not killing you.”

“But-” Tsumugi lets out a loud cry of distress as Miu continues to shove her towards the wall. “I don’t want the game to end like this! I want-”

Ryoma ignores her as they all reach the red Exisal that’s on the ground. Honestly, he’s rather impressed at how quickly Kaito reacted to the sound of glass smashing against the floor. As the smashing continued, everyone in the hangar had realised something had gone wrong. Since the Exisal is here, Ryoma presumes that Kaito reached Kokichi in time-

He almost walks past the Exisal without a second glance but stops dead in his tracks as he spots both Kaito and Kokichi slumped on top of each other. Even Tsumugi finally stops screaming as she realises that Kaito and Kokichi have not in fact left the game as they all presumed they had.

The tennis player feels sick as the automated sound of the body discovery announcement plays, sounding somewhat warped. It doesn’t bring Ryoma much relief that the announcement isn’t

paired with Monokuma's shrill voice.

"Oh *fuck*..." Miu genuinely sounds mortified as Ryoma freezes before staggering towards the two purple haired males.

His hands shake as he reaches down and grabs a wrist from both of them and waits, grimacing as he realises he can't feel a pulse from either of them. He tightens his hold, hoping that this is just some cruel joke and that if he holds on long enough then he might eventually feel a weak thump, thump, thump from one of them.

He doesn't.

"Is this...is this a *joke*?!" Tsumugi breaks down into a fit of manic giggles. "So *I* don't get to die but *they* do?! How is that fair?"

"Shut up," Ryoma snaps before taking in a shuddery breath. "Just...*shut up*."

"I...I thought they both made it," Miu says uncomfortably. "When neither of them returned I thought..."

"This isn't fair!" Tsumugi insists as she continues to fight Miu, thrashing like a wild animal. "Why do they get to die but I don't?! I bet they did this on purpose!"

"For goodness sake..." Ryoma runs a hand down his face. "Shirogane-"

"I bet you both think you're so clever!" Tsumugi shrieks at the two bodies. "I bet you both purposefully died just to spite me-"

"You're wrong," Ryoma says fiercely, wincing as he notices the bloody glass poking from Kokichi's side. "I know neither of them would've given up so easily. You're *sick* if you think they both died just to get one over on you."

Tsumugi shakes her head as Miu pushes her again. "Quit...pushing me!"

"Quit fucking fighting me then!" Miu retorts. "Throw as big of a fit as you want, you're leaving this game."

"I'll just come back!" Tsumugi counters hysterically. "Getting me out of this game...it doesn't mean *shit*! I'll just come back over and over and over-"

"Oh shut up, Shirogane." Ryoma's patience finally snaps. "Shut up, just shut the hell up."

"Aw? Are you gonna cry because you're all alone again?" Tsumugi taunts, cackling as Miu pushes her closer and closer towards the white light. "They might be dead but you can still avenge them! You can still kill me!"

As tempting as that sounds, what Tsumugi doesn't realise is that seeing Kokichi and Kaito leaning on top of each other just makes him even more sure that all he really wants is for Tsumugi to leave the simulation. Even though it feels like someone is pressing down on his chest, even though it feels like the world is starting to end, there's nothing more he wants right now than seeing Kokichi's will through until the very end.

Tsumugi chokes on a giggle as Miu gets her in front of the hole in the wall. "Even if you push me through that hole, I'll still be the winner! I can never lose! The despair I feel coming from you both right now...is...hey...why are you smiling?"

Ryoma shrugs as he ducks his head to the side, not wanting Tsumugi to see how watery his eyes are becoming. He looks down at Kokichi and Kaito. Whilst a part of him is screaming internally at them for both dying, he still can't help but feel...relieved. He looks at their linked hands and hums.

"Neither of them died alone," he says. "Since they had each other...I dunno, something tells me they didn't have to suffer for too long. What more could I possibly ask for?"

"They both left *you* alone!" Tsumugi points out. "Aren't you furious with them?! The exit is right in front of them! If they both tried a little harder then-"

"Shirogane, enough," Ryoma sighs. "Of course I would've preferred if they both got to leave the game with us but, well, obviously that can't happen now."

Tsumugi's right, he *is* furious with them both. They were both so close to the exit yet...

"I'll be able to see them again soon," Ryoma tells her.

Tsumugi rolls her eyes with a giggle. "They're not going to know who you are, dipshit."

"But I'm always going to know who they are," Ryoma says. He taps the side of his head. "And I'm always going to remember what happened here. It won't be the same but...well, what's done is done."

"Oh quit putting on a brave face! I know you want to scream at them!" Tsumugi sneers. "I know you want to curse them for selfishly leaving you behind! You're only smiling to annoy me-"

"And do you know what?" Ryoma says. "It's working, isn't it?"

Tsumugi gapes at him before Miu gives her one last push, throwing her into the white void outside of the wall. Ryoma's shoulders almost slump with relief when she doesn't return. He does, however, blink as the white from the hole starts to trickle into the academy slowly as if it was water.

"Fucking hell, she really is just one nasty bitch," Miu sighs as she dusts her hands. She pulls a face as her feet are slowly taken over by white light. "Hey...are you okay?"

"I...don't know," Ryoma admits, watching quietly as the white light slowly starts to blanket his friends. He presses the bottom of his palms into his eyes with a sniff. "Fuck..."

Miu hesitates before walking over to him. Her hand hovers over his shoulder before she places it down carefully. "Y'know, she was wrong about you being alone, you know? You've...you've got me."

Ryoma pulls one of his palms away and offers her a watery smile. "Thanks, Iruma."

"Yeah, well..." She rubs her nose awkwardly. "If it wasn't for you talking me down earlier, I might've done something really stupid and gotten myself killed. If that happened I would've forgotten about my time with Kiibo here and..."

"Since he's gone, you're responsible for keeping the memories of the times you spent together safe," Ryoma finishes for her. "I've...got a lot of memories I want to protect too."

The white light has reached his waist and Ryoma realises that the game is coming to an end. He sadly realises that both Kokichi and Kaito are completely submerged by now, the light has taken them away.

“Shall we get going?” Ryoma asks as he gestures towards the hole in the wall. “I think I’m...done with this place.”

“Fucking same,” Miu agrees.

The tennis player shoves his hands into his pocket and gives the school one last wistful look over his shoulder. Then, with Miu by his side, the two step through the hole in the wall, both of their heads full of memories that they both vow to cherish until the very end.

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He wakes up outside on a cold stone floor.

With a groan, he rolls his shoulders as he slowly sits himself up, one of his hands landing on the stone floor whilst another lands on grass. Sheesh, he doesn't remember falling asleep outside. He sighs and runs a hand through his hair, pouting as he notices some dirt fall from his head.

Kaito Momota, Luminary of the Stars, has no clue where he is.

He pulls himself up from the floor, wiping down his trousers when he realises with a grimace that he's not wearing his galaxy jacket. Aw man, that sucks. He *loves* that jacket! He hopes he can find it soon. Maybe it's lying around somewhere?

Kaito then mumbles a small '*what the fuck*' to himself as he looks up and notices a large glass wall. He turns around, practically spinning as he checks how far the wall stretches. Then, to his surprise, he notices opposite him that there's a large crack in the wall and he's instantly drawn to it. He totally wants to check that out! There's something peculiar about the crack too.

See, the glass wall shows that behind said glass, there should be a beautiful blue sky. However, where the glass is missing, all he can see is a dull grey. It's almost as if the hole in the wall has been filled in with a grey cement wall.

"Be careful!"

Kaito jumps suddenly, halfway down a set of stairs. A girl wearing a maid's dress catches his attention. She has a broom in her hand and she's sweeping what looks to be shattered glass to one side.

"My apologies," she says. "I didn't mean to alarm you. However, I must warn you that there's glass absolutely everywhere down here. If you want to explore this area then I advise you to be careful."

"Gonta already almost step on glass!" Kaito has no clue how he managed to miss the large male sitting under a tree. He waves at Kaito cheerfully. "Don't worry, Gonta didn't hurt himself because Tojo clear path for him!"

"That reminds me, I haven't introduced myself," the maid says before bowing. "My name is Kirumi Tojo and I'm the Ultimate Maid."

"Oh! I'm Kaito Momota!" Kaito excitedly responds. "Ultimate Astronaut and Luminary of the Stars!"

The large male looks up at Kaito with awe. "Wow, does that mean Momota scientist too?"

“You’re a scientist?” Kaito asks curiously. “That’s super cool!”

“Well, Gonta not Ultimate Scientist,” Gonta admits bashfully. “Gonta’s name is Gonta Gokuhara and Gonta’s talent is Ultimate Entomologist!”

“So you...study bugs, right?” Kaito says, clicking his fingers as he remembers what entomology is. “That’s awesome! I’ll keep you in mind if I end up finding a new species of insect in space!”

“Really?!” Gonta’s eyes shine brightly.

“Yeah, totally!” Kaito promises. “Listen man, as much I would love to chat, I totally want to check out the crack in the wall! My astronaut instincts are telling me that I should take a closer look!”

“Just be careful,” Kirumi warns him. “And watch out for glass, okay?”

“I’m always careful!” Kaito says before almost standing on a large shard of glass. He laughs off his mistake awkwardly and dashes off before Kirumi can lecture him.

The grass tickles his ankles as he gets closer to the crack. It seems someone else had the same idea as him as when he reaches the bottom of the large hole, there’s a girl inspecting the crack silently, her arms crossed tightly.

Woah, that girl has pretty long hair! It’s almost touching the ground! Good thing she has those red scrunchies to keep her hair under control!

The girl is either ignoring him or hasn’t realised he’s standing next to her yet. Kaito clears his throat before saying, “woah, this looks super strange!” As he presses his hand against the grey surface, he fails to notice how the girl flinches violently next to him. “And it *feels* weird too! Wonder why this part in particular has been filled in with...actually I don’t know what this grey stuff is. Feels super solid though!”

He laughs as he turns to face the girl. His smile wavers as he notices how...*sad* the girl looks. Her red eyes are wide and...full of grief? The girl looks at him as if he’s a ghost. Is she okay?

“Huh? What’s wrong?” Kaito asks. “You’re not hurt, are you? Wait, you didn’t catch yourself on the glass, right?”

“Momota?”

“Hah?! How do you know my name?” Kaito blinks. “Hey, do we know each other or something? Aw man, it’ll be super awkward if we do since...ah, well, I’m really sorry but I don’t know who you are!”

The girl sucks in a breath as if she’s just been slapped. Then, in a blink of an eye, the vulnerable look in her eyes is quickly veiled with a hard expression. “No, we don’t know each other.”

“Then how do you know my-”

“It doesn’t matter,” she says before tightly crossing her arms.

“...well I still should introduce myself to you anyway!” Kaito insists before pounding his fists together. “I’m Kaito Momota, Luminary of the Stars! Even crying...women with red scrunchies...adore the Ultimate Astronaut?”

The girl instantly hides her face but Kaito still manages to catch her mortified expression as she

realises that there's a tear trickling down her cheek. The girl dressed in red furiously wipes it away.

"Hey, are you okay?" Kaito asks with a frown. "You're-"

"There was just some dust in my eye," she insists, her tone suggesting that he shouldn't argue with her.

"Oh...if you say so," Kaito mumbles. "So...what's your name? Are you also an Ultimate?"

The girl refuses to look him in the eye but she does say, "my name is Maki Harukawa. I'm..." She sighs. "The Ultimate Assassin."

Holy shit, did she just say Ultimate Assassin?!

"However..." She fiddles with her hair with a frown. "I can assure you that you don't need to be scared of me. Someone...taught me some time ago that I can be so much more than the title that was given to me so...I can promise you that you don't need to consider me as your enemy."

"H-Hold on just a second! Why would I want to consider you to be my enemy in the first place?!" Kaito asks as he looks Maki up and down. "You don't look like someone I need to be scared of!"

Maki pauses and Kaito swears he sees the corners of her lips quirk upwards before she quickly goes back to looking stoic. "I see..."

"So anyway, do you know what's going on here?" Kaito asks before gesturing towards the slab of grey between the glass. "This totally looks out of place if I do say so myself. Got any idea why this part of the wall is grey and the rest is made from glass? Actually, scratch that, why is there a wall above us anyway?"

Maki frowns at the slab of grey before saying, "it's...complicated. There's...a lot you don't know-"

"So you know what's going on?!" Kaito wipes his forehead. "Phew! What a *relief!*"

"As much as I want to tell you everything," Maki says, "there's something I need to do first. Rather, there's someone I need to apprehend."

"Huh?" Kaito raises an eyebrow.

"I just needed to check to see if she actually did something with the wall and..." Maki's eyebrows press together as she looks up at the random streak of grey. "Seems she wasn't bluffing when she said she was going to disable the exit around the wall."

"H-Hold on a second, what are you-"

"I'm really sorry Momota but there's simply no time to explain everything to you right now," Maki says. "There's someone really dangerous here that I need to stop before she hurts anyone. I think she's done something so no one else can load in at the moment and everyone else was planning to..." She sighs. "Sorry, I'm probably not making any sense to you."

"It's fine!" Kaito responds, hoping that he's hiding his confusion well. "But when you say there's a dangerous person here-"

Maki's eyes suddenly look like they're glowing as her expression darkens. "Tsumugi Shirogane. Long blue hair, blue eyes. Stay away from her at all costs, do you understand me?"

Kaito freezes under her intense gaze and nods quickly. “Y-Yep!”

“Good.” Maki walks away from the wall.

“Wait, hold on just a second!” Kaito follows her. “Why is she dangerous? Can you at least tell me-”

“Protect me, Kiiboy!”

“I-I’m trying but there’s only so much I can do whilst you’re clinging onto my back!”

Kaito raises an eyebrow as he and Maki head back up the stairs. He sees what seems to be a robot struggling significantly whilst a small purple haired male clings onto his back, blood running freely from his nose. Kaito fails to notice how Maki’s jaw tightens for a split second before she unlocks it without a word.

“Woah, woah, *woah!* What’s going on here?!” Kaito asks loudly, catching the attention of the two students.

The robot spins around with a distressed look on his face. Just as he’s about to speak, the purple haired male starts to cry. “This random girl just burst into the classroom we were in and just *hit me* for *no* reason at all!”

Maki’s shoulders go stiff. “Did she have blue hair and blue eyes? Glasses?”

“That’s correct,” the robot answers with a frown. “Um, do you know her? If you do, is it possible that you could talk some sense into her? Whilst I’ve only known Ouma for five minutes and have quickly figured out that he can be rather annoying, she really did just hit him for no reason at all.”

“Did you just call me annoying? How rude!” The purple haired male pouts. “What sort of robot lets a human be hurt in the first place anyway? You had one job, Kiiboy! One!”

“I-I got you outside, didn’t I?” The robot grumbles. “You’re not exactly being much help either! All you’ve done is cling onto my back and make things ten times harder than they need to be!”

The purple haired male giggles.

“So she’s inside?” Maki asks. Kaito notices that she’s focussing most of her attention onto the robot rather than the male on his back. In fact, it’s almost as if she’s just flat out ignoring the purple haired male altogether.

The robot looks like he’s about to nod when the school doors slam open. Kaito blinks before realising that hey, wait a second, there’s the blue haired girl Maki has been looking for. He’s surprised at how wild the girl’s eyes look and goes to turn to Maki to ask her what the blue haired girl’s issue is when he realises Maki is no longer next to him.

One second she’s standing next to him, the next Maki has Tsumugi by the throat, holding her high in the air with a dangerous glint in her eye. Kaito stares incredulously, jaw dropping wide open as he watches the unbelievable scene play out in front of him.

Just what the hell is going on here?

So almost one year ago I had this idea in my head where I wanted to write a scene where Kokichi finds Kaito in an Exisal and basically planned an entire story around that one scene alone. Could I have just written a one shot instead? Probably. Did I decide to instead write another very long fic? Yep.

Final Loop - Chapter 1 Part 1

Chapter Notes

First off I am so sorry that this chapter took so long to come out. I simply didn't have the time/motivation to start writing again until recently. I am pleased with how this chapter turned out however. Sorry in advance if there are any mistakes.

Secondly, sorry for not responding to all of the comments left on the previous chapter! I've never received so many comments on a single chapter before! Thank you so much to everyone who left a comment! To all the people I haven't responded to as of posting this chapter, I'm super sorry and if I have the time to I will try to reply to them! But seriously, I just want to say a big thanks to everyone!

Also thanks for 700+ kudos! I'm in awe that so many people are enjoying my writing! Aaaaa! Thank you all so much!

I hope you all enjoy my writing! Have a nice day!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“What are you *doing*?!”

Kaito doesn't mean to yell but watching Maki go from suddenly standing next to him to throttling Tsumugi in front of a large school justifiably surprises him. He sees Maki's shoulders go tense but she doesn't loosen her grip. In fact, when Tsumugi opens her mouth, Maki's hand only *tightens*.

“Holy shit, Kiiboy. Are all the girls here terrifying or have we just had shit luck bumping into people?” The small purple haired boy subtly places himself behind the robot, who is currently gawping at both Maki and Tsumugi with wide eyes.

“I...” The robot pulls a face. “I am unsure on how to answer your question.”

Maki shoots a quick glare at the two smaller males before focussing her attention back on Tsumugi, who is currently looking down at the assassin with a very hard to decipher look on her face. Kaito can't tell if Tsumugi is pleased with the current turn of events or if she's terrified. All that he knows is that her eyes are swirling with an emotion he can't place his finger on.

“O-Oh, so you got in,” Tsumugi wheezes out, placing one of her own hands over the top of Maki's. The assassin's glare intensifies. “Well, I can work with that. Even if you do kill me-”

“I'm not killing you,” Maki responds coldly, talking over Tsumugi as she tries to say something. “And I'm not even letting you get the chance to start another killing game. As soon as Iruma figures out a way to reactivate the wall, we're all leaving. Got it?”

Tsumugi's lips curl into a sneer. “Is that so? You're not the one in control here, *I am*-”

“Shut up, you're not in control.” Maki's hand trembles around Tsumugi's throat. “You haven't been for a very long time.”

“H-Hey, what's going on here?” Kaito slowly approaches the two girls cautiously, holding his

hands up as he gets closer. “Harukawa, right? I really don’t know what’s going on right now but you’re going to hurt her if you don’t let go.”

Tsumugi shoots Kaito an amused look before settling her gaze on Maki once more. “Aw, isn’t Momota so considerate? If only he could remember all of the bad things I’ve done-”

Maki’s jaw tightens as her entire body trembles. Tsumugi gasps as Maki squeezes a little too tight and Kaito quickly tries to pry her hand from the blue haired girl. “H-Harukawa, seriously! What are you doing?!”

“I...” Maki looks at him as if he’s just slapped her. She quickly averts her gaze before relaxing her hand and straight away Tsumugi greedily sucks in a deep breath.

“I’m not sure what’s going on but I don’t think violence is the right answer,” says the robot. Kiiboy? Surely that can’t be his name, right? The robot timidly holds out his hands. “Um, Harukawa, correct? I’m not sure what...ah, whoever this girl is has done to upset you so much but strangling her is not okay-”

The purple haired boy scoffs. “Of course strangling someone isn’t okay.”

The robot huffs. “Ouma, please be quiet. Clearly the situation we’re currently dealing with is very delicate-”

“I think the word you’re looking for is absolutely *insane*,” the purple haired boy responds before crossing his arms. “And I’m not waiting around to be choked out or hit again so-”

Maki blatantly ignores them both and flexes her hand, turning her attention mostly on the girl in her grasp. “It would be in your best interest to keep your mouth shut from now on before I find a way to keep you quiet. *Permanently*.”

“I thought you just said you're not going to kill her?!” Kaito tries to pull Maki away but she firmly stands her ground. Kaito watches as Tsumugi’s face turns a startling shade of red from being held up for too long. He notices that the blue haired girl’s feet are barely touching the ground. The tips of her shoes occasionally scrabble for something to stand on but fail each time. “Harukawa!”

“It’ll take a lot more than this to actually kill her,” Maki tells him all the while keeping her gaze locked on Tsumugi.

“Even so,” Kiibo says, ignoring the purple haired male’s attempt to stop him from going any closer to Maki and Tsumugi, “I can’t just stand around and let you hurt her. I am not sure what your issue with her is but strangling someone is never okay.”

“Yeah, Harukawa,” Tsumugi taunts. “Strangling someone is never okay!”

“You’d know if I was actually strangling you,” Maki warns her with a scowl. She does, however, lower Tsumugi down far enough so that her feet are flat against the floor. “And it would be in your best interest to keep your mouth shut from here on out.”

“Oh? And what are you going to do if I keep talking?” Tsumugi asks. “Kill me? If that’s the case then-”

“No one is killing anyone!” Kaito instantly intervenes. “I don’t know what’s going on but-”

“She wants everyone here to kill each other,” Maki tells him and Kaito stumbles back as if she’s just punched him hard in the stomach. Tsumugi pouts childishly and Maki once again talks over

her when she tries to explain herself. “She treats murder like a game. She wants to watch people kill each other for her own entertainment. She wants to watch people...” Maki chews her lip before spitting out a couple more words. “Fall into *despair*.”

Tsumugi starts to whine. “*Harukawa!* What sort of reveal is that?!”

“I’m not revealing anything,” Maki says. “I’m *warning* everyone about you and your twisted desires.”

“Hold on for just a second!” The robot looks panicked as he puts his hands to his head. “I simply can’t compute what you just said, Harukawa. Did you just say that...”

“That girl wants us all to kill each other for her own entertainment?” The boy with purple hair jerks his head in Tsumugi’s direction whilst crossing his arms. His expression has been schooled into something unreadable.

“T-This just has to be some sort of big misunderstanding, right?!” Kaito nervously swallows.

“I’m telling the truth,” Maki insists firmly.

“But how do you know all of this, hmm?” The purple haired boy raises an eyebrow. “I mean, you’re the one currently trying to choke someone to death in front of a group of people. Out of everyone here, you’re the one who is the biggest threat at the moment.”

Tsumugi smirks when Maki shoots the small male a dark glare. “Oh my. He does have a point, Harukawa-”

“Shut it.” Maki aims her glare back at Tsumugi. “And I know all of this because...”

Maki suddenly hesitates, grimacing as she chews her bottom lip.

“Because?” The robot prompts. “I really would appreciate some sort of explanation for all of this, Harukawa. I do not wish to antagonise you but...like Ouma said, you’re the one who is, well, currently holding someone by the throat in front of us all. Whilst you might not be outright choking her...”

Tsumugi snorts. “Well this certainly is a funny turn of events. Don’t you agree, Harukawa? You thought you could log yourself in and ruin everything but look at how things are turning out!”

“Excuse me but if Harukawa gives us a reasonable explanation and offers us some proof to back up her claims then I will very much believe in what she has to say,” the robot suddenly says to the blue haired girl. “And it’s not like you’ve made a good first impression either. The first thing you did when you entered the classroom Ouma and I were in was hit Ouma-”

“My nose is still bleeding by the way,” the small male adds.

The robot grimaces. “Ah, that is correct. Um...”

“Okay, how about we do this?” Kaito quickly takes over. He points at the robot. “You and, uh...” He hesitates as he struggles to remember the smaller male’s name. “*Ouma* find something to clean his nose with whilst I gather everyone else up. I know that there’s more people here and if what Harukawa is saying is true then everyone needs to be warned about Shirogane.”

Maki’s lips go thin before she starts to grumble. “I am telling the truth.”

There's something about the way she averts her gaze almost sadly that makes Kaito want to squeeze her shoulder reassuringly. Instead, he offers her a grin. "Yeah, something is telling me that you are! Don't look so tense! If you say you're telling the truth then I believe you!"

"Eh? But what about me?" Tsumugi blinks. "For all you know, Harukawa could just be lying and trying to trick you all!"

"W-Well..." Kaito falters before absentmindedly rubbing the end of his nose as he looks off into the distance. "Maybe all of this is just one huge misunderstanding?"

"It's not," Maki responds flatly. "She's just trying to get inside of your head, Momota. Ignore her."

"I'm just making a point," Tsumugi says. She pats Maki's hand playfully and the assassin recoils, looking down at Tsumugi's hand with a disgusted look on her face. "After all, we've all just woken up here and it seems you might be the only person who knows what's going on. That makes you look very suspicious, Harukawa."

"Don't you dare call me suspicious," Maki mutters. Kaito notices that her fingers have gone tense, as if ready to squeeze Tsumugi's neck again. "You and I both know that you're the biggest threat here, Shirogane. I know you want another killing game to happen. I know you'll do anything to get everyone to turn on each other. I know you'll happily get your hands dirty just to start a game no one but you wants."

Tsumugi hums as she peacefully allows her eyes to flutter shut. "Prove it, Harukawa."

For a moment Kaito is convinced that Maki is going to do something stupid but thankfully she doesn't. Instead, the assassin huffs before saying, "sooner or later you're going to slip up or get bored. In the end, everyone always finds out who you really are, Shirogane. You're not getting another killing game."

Tsumugi stills before lazily cracking open one of her eyes. "Whatever you say, Harukawa."

Kaito catches the robot and the purple haired boy both uncomfortably head inside of the school together whilst Maki continues to glare daggers into Tsumugi. Maki looks like she's in deep thought as she continues to restrain Tsumugi with only a single hand. Truthfully, Kaito can't help but feel intimidated. Maki certainly doesn't look like she's all that strong but maybe her uniform is simply obscuring her muscles.

He knows he needs to gather everyone else but he also doesn't want to just leave. Whilst Maki did say she isn't going to kill Tsumugi, it doesn't feel right leaving them both alone together. He bites the inside of his mouth, hesitating. Then, to his surprise, he notices Tsumugi looking at him curiously through one cracked open eye.

"Eh? I thought you were going to gather everyone else?" Tsumugi says before smiling gently. "Or are you convinced that the moment you turn your back Harukawa will snap my neck?"

Maki bristles as Kaito yelps out, "of course I don't think Harukawa is going to hurt you!"

"I thought I told you to shut up?" Maki shakes Tsumugi with an irritated scowl before turning to Kaito. "And why haven't you left yet? I already told you that I'm not going to hurt her." She pauses and Kaito can imagine her adding *'are you not going because you don't trust me?'*

"If what you're saying is true," Kaito says, "I just think leaving the two of you alone together probably isn't the best idea-"

"I'm the only person here who is capable of dealing with her," Maki tells him. "She's dangerous, Momota. She's *poison*. All she does is lie and manipulate. I don't want to even let her get the chance to hurt you. Even if you get the strongest person here to restrain her, she'll find a way to weasel her way out of every situation. I know all of her tricks and there's no way in hell I'm letting her control me."

"You're making me out to be some sort of monster," Tsumugi mumbles. She pouts. "Yet you're the one who is still holding me by the neck when I'm clearly not doing anything. You could restrain me by holding my arms, you know? You're just choosing to be cruel." Tsumugi raises an eyebrow in Kaito's direction. "Hey Momota, doesn't that say a lot about her?"

Kaito sighs. On one hand Tsumugi is making a point but on the other he can't think of a reason why Maki would lie about such a thing. Every time Tsumugi tries to make him doubt Maki, the assassin always looks so sad, even if she does try to veil her disappointment. "Hey Harukawa, do you think you could treat her a little more...humanely at least?"

Tsumugi's lip twitches into a smug smile as Maki freezes. Her thumb rubs over Tsumugi's throat before she lets it go and quickly pins Tsumugi's arms behind her back instead. "Did you hear that, Harukawa? He told you to treat me *humanely*! You're not making a very good first impression, are you?"

"I think it would be in your best interest to be quiet, Shirogane," Kaito adds. "Whilst I don't really know who either of you are and I don't understand the situation we're in, the way you're acting just isn't sitting right with me at all. Just...stop purposefully antagonising Harukawa, okay?"

Tsumugi puffs her cheeks out. "But what if you're trusting the wrong person? You're putting a lot of trust into an assassin, Momota-"

"Out of both of you, you're the one who is acting the most untrustworthy," Kaito points out.

"Wouldn't an innocent person be trying to plead their case?" Maki adds. "You've done nothing but spout nonsense. Shut up and let Momota make his own decisions."

Something warm flutters in his stomach as Maki defends him. "That's right, I'm capable of making my own decisions!"

Tsumugi rolls her eyes with a sneer. "Yeah but you're the type of person who makes stupid decision after stupid decision. You might have a lot more to remember right now if you hadn't made what is possibly the worst choice I've ever seen someone make just maybe a couple of minutes ago."

"Eh?" Kaito blinks slowly whilst Maki's entire expression darkens instantaneously. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, *ah*-" Tsumugi winces as Maki shoves her forward, all but pushing her away from the school and towards what looks like a dormitory. The blue haired girl looks over her shoulder with a feverish glint in her eye. "Harukawa, you're *hurting* me!"

"I don't care." Maki squeezes Tsumugi's wrists harshly and Kaito almost winces when he spots how pale they turn. "I thought I told you to keep your mouth shut-"

"Oh, I just realised," Tsumugi says with a wide grin. "It must've been so hard for you to watch Momota willingly pick to die with someone like-"

Maki digs her fingernails into Tsumugi's skin and despite the slight distance between himself and

the two girls, Kaito straight away notices how the insides of Maki's fingernails turn pink. He can't help but be surprised by Maki's behaviour. He doesn't know what's going on but isn't she being a little cruel? He has no idea what Tsumugi is on about and quite frankly he also wants her to shut up but physically hurting her is a step too far.

"Harukawa, stop it!" Kaito finds himself shouting. "You're hurting her!"

His gut uncomfortably clenches as Maki once again only stops because he told her to. She doesn't outright let Tsumugi go but she instead holds her wrists with the pads of her fingers instead of her fingernails. Maki has her back turned so he can't see her expression. He wonders what sort of face she is pulling right now.

Tsumugi throws her head back ever so slightly as she says, "he's right, Harukawa. You're hurting me! Wow, good thing Momota is around to make you behave! He's my hero!"

The assassin ends up pushing Tsumugi so hard that she ends up on her knees. Kaito barely manages to stop his jaw from dropping before he quickly rushes over, wincing as Maki wordlessly drags Tsumugi back to her feet and continues to push her towards the dormitory.

He catches Kirumi and Gonta head up the stone stairs along with a girl he must've missed. She's wearing a yellow raincoat that is as bright as her smile. All three of them falter as they spot Maki roughly push Tsumugi into the dormitory building.

"Momota?" Kirumi speaks up first. She has a concerned frown on her face. "Whatever is going on?"

"Uh..." Kaito helplessly flickers his eyes from Maki pushing Tsumugi around to the trio watching hesitantly from the top of the stone stairs. "So there's a bit of a situation-"

"Help, I'm being kidnapped!" Tsumugi decides to cry out with a very believable look of distress on her face. Her bottom lip wobbles. "T-This girl is *hurting me* and I don't know why!"

Straight away Kirumi's expression turns stern and Kaito quickly steals her attention by loudly saying, "that's a *lie*! Harukawa is simply..." Actually where is Maki taking her?

Maki impatiently turns her attention to the confused trio and says, "this girl right here is Tsumugi Shirogane and she is a very dangerous threat, got it? Stay away from her at all costs."

"But..." Gonta looks conflicted as he says, "she doesn't look like threat. She looks *scared*."

"She is a threat," Maki responds sternly. "She's very manipulative and she wants to hurt everyone here."

"Yeah but, like, it looks like *you're* the one who is hurting her," the girl with white pigtails says. She bobs her head back and forth as she looks up at the sky with a thoughtful expression. "So like..."

Kirumi turns to Kaito with a frown. "Momota, what on earth is going on?"

He can't lie, the fact that Kirumi turned to him for an explanation fills him with pride. Kaito's glad that despite not knowing each other, Kirumi at least thinks he's trustworthy enough to give her an explanation. He rubs the back of his head awkwardly. "So the girl with the brown hair, Harukawa, thinks that Shirogane, the girl with the blue hair, has trapped us here and wants us all to kill each other."

“What?” Kirumi blinks and straight away Kaito notices her shoulders go stiff.

Gonta lets out a cry of alarm. “Huh? What do you mean, Momota?!”

The girl with the yellow raincoat starts to chew her lip as she quietly hides behind Gonta. “Are you telling the truth? Angie will know if you’re lying to her.”

Everyone is looking at him as if he holds all the answers. Kaito clears his throat as he once again looks at Maki and Tsumugi. The assassin isn’t looking at him since she’s focussing all of her attention on keeping Tsumugi restrained. Tsumugi is looking at him almost expectantly.

“Well, I, ah...” Kaito pauses.

“Momota, do you believe that Harukawa is telling the truth?” Kirumi asks. She worries her lip between her teeth. “Because if her claims are true then...”

Maki has stopped pushing Tsumugi in favour of waiting to hear what Kaito has to say. He doesn’t like how she keeps her back turned, he doesn’t know why but he wants to see her face. “I do think that...Harukawa isn’t lying but...”

“Very hard to believe that someone wants us all to kill each other,” Gonta says, stealing the words straight from his mouth. “Gonta really hope that all this just one big misunderstanding. Maybe Harukawa confused? After all, we all just wake up here-”

“I haven’t just woken up here,” Maki tells him quietly. Gonta tilts his head to the side. “There’s a lot that all of you don’t know and I assure you all that once it’s safe to do so, I will tell everyone everything. However, my top priority right now is to find a way to restrain Shirogane so she can’t do anything to kickstart yet another killing game.”

Kirumi puts a hand to her mouth as she mumbles quietly to herself, “yet *another* killing game?”

Kaito isn’t sure whether Angie is aware that she’s hiding herself even further behind Gonta. The small girl pokes her head from behind Gonta’s torso with a confused look on her face. “Eh? So you haven’t just woken up here like the rest of us? That’s, like, kind of suspicious. Angie has only just woken up and Kirumi and Gonta have too, so...”

Maki huffs impatiently. “I already said that I’ll explain everything once it’s safe to do so.”

“So you’re asking us to blindly trust you?” Kirumi asks and Kaito is impressed when the maid doesn’t even flinch as Maki stares at her with an annoyed look on her face. “My apologies but you must see this from not only my point of view but everyone else’s too. None of us know each other and for all we know you could just be lying-”

“I’m not lying,” Maki snaps, narrowing her eyes. “I *hate* lies and I *hate* liars.”

“Gonta no like lies either but...” Gonta grits his teeth with an almost pained expression. “Gonta think you’re hurting Shirogane because her hands look very pale, even fingertips are starting to go purple.”

A flash of surprise appears in Maki’s eyes before she looks down at Tsumugi’s hands. She does seem genuinely shocked to see that Gonta is telling the truth and Tsumugi’s fingers are starting to turn a pale purple.

Tsumugi uses her hair to curtain her face before letting out a small snuffle. “She really is hurting me and I don’t know why. I’m not sure why she’s trying to manipulate all of you-”

Before Maki can refute Kaito quickly says, “hey, cut it out! Harukawa isn’t trying to manipulate everyone, she’s just trying to keep everyone here safe! If all of this turns out to just be one big misunderstanding then I’m sure Harukawa will apologise to you but even you must understand that we need to take Harukawa’s accusation seriously.”

“I just think it’s very mean that you’re all treating me like I’m some criminal,” Tsumugi responds. “Look at my arms, Momota. You can see where she’s been digging her fingernails into me, right? She’s choosing to be rough with me right now yet you’re all taking her side?”

“How about this then?” Kirumi takes a step forward, clasping her hands down by her waist. “I will supervise Harukawa whilst she finds a way to safely restrain Shirogane so that there’s no foul play-”

“Why am I the only one being restrained?!” Tsumugi cries. “If I’m being restrained then Harukawa should be too! She’s the one acting all deranged right now!”

“You’re acting like you’re completely innocent,” Maki says. “You hurt someone the moment they woke up here and someone else also witnessed you do so.”

Tsumugi pauses. “I-I was *scared*-”

“I think if I ask Kiibo then he would say otherwise,” Maki responds.

Kirumi sighs before turning to Kaito. “Momota, do you know anything about this?”

“Yeah! Harukawa and I were heading towards the school earlier when two people exited it and one of them had a bloody nose. I think his name was...Ouma! That’s right! Ouma had a bloody nose and both him and Kiibo said that Shirogane had hit him so...” Kaito crosses his arms with a satisfied nod. “It’s definitely true that Shirogane has hurt someone here already.”

“I see...” Kirumi starts to rub her chin. “Although I’m not sure how this is related to Shirogane wanting everyone here to kill each other. Harukawa’s allegation is...very serious.”

“So if Shirogane really is a dangerous person then why is Harukawa taking her to the dormitory?” Angie asks as she clasps her hands behind her back. “Is Harukawa gonna put her to bed early as some sort of punishment?”

“What sort of question is that?” Maki grumbles. “I’m going to restrain her and keep her locked in her room so we all know where she is.”

“Can Harukawa just lock Shirogane in bedroom but not restrain her?” Gonta asks. “Gonta feels uncomfortable letting Shirogane be restrained. Not very nice to think about.”

Maki’s expression surprisingly softens. “If I thought she would be safe to be left unrestrained then I would let her roam around freely. However, she’s a threat. A very dangerous threat. If I simply just lock her in her bedroom and she escapes then she’s capable of doing absolutely anything. Restraining her is the safest option.”

“But I’m not a threat,” Tsumugi whines. “You’re all being unfair! Why are you all taking her side? I have no clue what she’s on about! For all we know, maybe *she*’s the one who wants to host a killing game!”

“Maybe we should lock them both up to be safe?” Angie suddenly suggests, looking far too calm considering the situation. “Like, Angie is totally getting bad vibes from both of them and she isn’t sure which one is telling the truth so isn’t locking them both up until we figure out what’s going on

the best idea?"

"Well Harukawa says she has proof that Shirogane is dangerous," Kaito says. "So it would be pointless to lock her up. A-And what do you mean that you're getting bad vibes from *both* of them?!"

Angie clasps her hands together as she answers softly, "Angie's God is warning her to keep her distance from both of them. He says that they're both dangerous and the further Angie stays away from them, the better."

"Don't worry, Angie! If you feel unsafe then Gonta promises to protect you!" Gonta pumps both of his fists enthusiastically by his sides. "In fact, Gonta promises to keep everyone here safe from any danger! Gonta is very strong so he can fight if he needs to!"

Kaito quietly sneaks a glance at Gonta. The entomologist certainly does have huge muscles that are barely being contained by his brown uniform. Kaito likes to pride himself for being muscular himself but even just looking at Gonta makes him realise that he probably doesn't want to get on Gonta's bad side. His temperament may be gentle but he doubts his punches are.

"I'm not a threat," Maki mumbles quietly and fails to hide how disappointed she sounds. Her cheeks are slightly puffed out and if the situation was different then Kaito would find Maki's expression almost amusing.

"Oh really?" Tsumugi drawls out. She cocks her head to the side. "I think you are. I mean, you're the Ultimate Assassin, right? I think your title alone makes you easily the biggest threat here."

Tsumugi suddenly yelps loudly and her fingers go from a pale purple to an alarming shade of deep violet. Maki's hands have gone rigid to the point that Kaito can almost see the outlines of her knuckles, her fingers acting like claws as she subconsciously starts to dig her fingers and fingernails into Tsumugi's wrists so tightly that it causes Tsumugi to make a pained expression.

Kaito doesn't even need to look at Maki's face to know that she's probably furious right now. It's a morbid thought but he realises that even though Maki is clearly causing Tsumugi a fair amount of pain right now, she's *still* holding back. However, when he spots a trickle of blood splatter onto the floor from Tsumugi's wrist, Kaito can't help but think that enough is enough. This...this isn't right.

He puts a hand on Maki's shoulder and she jolts as if she has just suddenly returned into her own body. She tilts her head to the side, clearly trying to hide her face from Kaito. He does manage to catch a glimpse of her expression and sees that she's frowning. Does she feel ashamed?

"Harukawa, let her go," Kaito tells her and starts to untangle Maki's hands from Tsumugi's arms. "It isn't fair making you hold her when she's being so cruel. I'll hold her."

"But-"

"You're hurting her," Kaito says softly. "I can see that you're angry and...yeah, if you're right about her then I'd be angry too but..."

Maki silently looks down at the small splotch of pink on the floor and then down at her own hands, her entire body stiff as she stares at her bloody fingernails. Kaito hears her take a sharp intake of breath. "...okay, you hold onto her for now."

"Does anyone know where first aid kit is?" Gonta asks nervously. "Shirogane bleeding."

"There...should be some in the warehouse inside of the school," Maki reveals, crossing her arms as

she gestures towards the school with a quick tilt of her head. "Head inside, turn left and follow the hallway. There should be a sign saying which door leads to the warehouse."

"Have...you been here before?" Kirumi asks curiously. "You sound like you're familiar with the layout of this place."

Maki nods. "Not only me either, we all have."

Kaito's eyebrows shoot upwards in surprise. "Eh?"

"I'll explain later," Maki says before sighing. "I know...I'm asking a lot for you all to trust me but I promise I really am telling the truth. I'm just...trying to keep you all safe. I swear."

Tsumugi clicks her tongue impatiently before saying, "well you're not doing a very good job, Harukawa."

"C'mon, Shirogane," Kaito sighs. "I know you're also probably really angry too but imagine you're Harukawa for a second-"

"She already has," Maki grumbles quietly to herself.

"-how would you react if you thought someone was going to put an entire group of people in danger for entertainment?" Kaito asks. "I mean yeah, I don't think Harukawa should've hurt you but..."

"But what?" Tsumugi raises an eyebrow. "Are you going to say that you think Harukawa treating me so harshly is okay? What if I'm actually innocent, hmm? I want an apology from Harukawa for causing me to bleed right now. In fact, I want an apology from *all* of you for not even trying to stop her either."

Kaito pulls a face. "But-"

"Do you not believe in innocent until proven guilty?" Tsumugi asks airily. "When you all realise that Harukawa is lying I'm not going to forgive any of you for treating me so cruelly, you know? Unless I get an apology right now then I promise as soon as you all realise I'm innocent, I'm not going to be anyone's friend here."

The first thought that springs into Kaito's mind is how can someone be so petty? Tsumugi is holding her head high up in the air, her eyes sealed shut and her cheeks puffed out as if she was a scolded child. There's something horribly calculated about the way she speaks, something that just doesn't sit right with him. Kaito chews his lip uncomfortably and from the corner of his eye he spots that Kirumi and Gonta also look rather put off. Angie has gone back to hiding behind Gonta.

Maki rolls her eyes impatiently. "No one is apologising to you. You don't deserve any apologies."

"My blood is on the floor and it's all your fault-"

"Enough." Kirumi inhales deeply through her nose before letting out a quiet breath. "This has gone on for too long. All of this pointless bickering is not getting us anywhere. There are much more important things that need to be discussed right now."

"You're right," Tsumugi says. "We should be talking about how Harukawa is clearly making up lies-"

"Please be quiet," Kirumi says and her tone leaves no room for any arguing. "Shirogane, for now it

would be for the best if you stay in your bedroom.” Kirumi turns to Maki warily. “Unrestrained.”

Maki’s gaze sharpens. “Tojo, that’s a horrible idea-”

“Shirogane did make a point that we should assume people are innocent until proven guilty,” Kirumi responds. “Harukawa, I do fully intend to take your accusation very seriously but we can’t also treat Shirogane like a criminal either. The most I think we should do is keep her locked in her room whilst you tell us what you know. I’m not letting her be treated like a prisoner until I know the entire truth.”

“Ugh...” Tsumugi starts to pout. “So you’re believing her over me? Did you not hear me when I said that she’s the Ultimate Assassin?! She’s probably trying to corner me so that she can kill me-”

“Harukawa already said that she’s not going to kill you,” Kaito says. “And I believe her.”

“Well you shouldn’t,” Tsumugi says. “She’s the threat around here, not me!”

Kirumi rubs her chin thoughtfully before saying, “well if Harukawa really is the Ultimate Assassin then I personally find it rather unusual that she’s picking to restrain you instead of flat out killing you since I assume that’s what an assassin would do if they find out someone is a threat.”

“That’s...” Maki looks down at the floor with a hazy look in her eyes. “You’re making it sound like I murder people to solve all of my problems. That’s...not true at all.”

Kirumi blinks. “My...apologies, Harukawa. I wasn’t trying to offend you. I just simply thought that-”

“Forget it.” Maki pauses. “Can we just...get all of this over with? All of this back and forth arguing is...”

Pointless. Kaito clears his throat loudly so everyone looks at him. “Alright, so here’s what we’re going to do. Gonta and Angie are going to go to the warehouse and find a first aid kit whilst Harukawa, Tojo and I are going to take Shirogane to her room. After that we’re going to find everyone else and Harukawa is going to tell us everything she knows. Got it?”

When no one argues Kaito assumes that everyone is happy with his plan. He watches tiredly as Gonta and Angie both walk away a little too quickly. He can’t exactly blame them for being so uncomfortable, both Kiibo and Ouma also bolted the first chance they got too.

Tsumugi does start to whine childishly as Maki leads everyone to the blue haired girl’s bedroom. Kaito doesn’t know what he was expecting to see but he can’t help but feel surprised when he sees that there’s sixteen doors inside of the dormitory and that there’s photographs of people placed above each door. He raises an eyebrow as he spots his own photo.

Tsumugi’s bedroom is rather plain. There’s the expected sort of furniture inside, like a bed and a desk and a couch and a bookcase. There’s also even a bathroom. The room reminds Kaito of a hotel bedroom more than anything.

The blue haired girl flops down on the end of her bed with a sigh, wringing her hands together as she juts her bottom lip out. “You know, I can’t help but think how unfair all of this is. I’m the one who got attacked yet you’re all acting like I’m the problem.”

“If we find out that Harukawa is lying then I promise everyone here will apologise profusely,” Kirumi says. “But you must understand that-”

“Allegations like the one Harukawa made need to be taken seriously,” Tsumugi responds with a large roll of her eyes. “What if I was the one who said she was dangerous first? Would she be the one being locked in her room right now?”

Kirumi sighs. “Most likely. I know that you must be frustrated right now but it would be in your best interest to cooperate as best as you can to make this easier for everyone.”

Tsumugi gestures towards herself. “I clearly *am* cooperating.”

“And we appreciate that,” Kaito says as he puts a hand on his hip. “Listen, hopefully all of this really is just one huge misunderstanding. I mean, it would be helpful if you didn’t have such a…”

“Horrible attitude,” Maki finishes for him. “And like I said before, it won’t take you long to get bored or slip up.”

Tsumugi hums as Maki grabs the chair at Tsumugi’s desk and leads everyone out of the room. Once all three of them are out and Tsumugi is left sitting on her bed, Maki props the chair under Tsumugi’s door handle with a satisfied huff.

Kirumi looks at the chair dryly. “Is this truly necessary?”

Maki nods. “You won’t let me restrain her so this is the next best option since we can’t lock the door.” She lets out a tired breath and tucks a loose strand of hair behind her ear. “She really is dangerous. I don’t...I don’t particularly like having to treat people so harshly but she’s...a completely different level of vicious. Once you’ve heard what I have to say then you’ll understand.”

“I see...” Kirumi hesitates. “By the way...is it true what Shirogane said? Are you actually the Ultimate Assassin?”

Maki blinks like a deer caught in the headlights before clicking her tongue. “That’s right, that’s the title that was given to me. I suppose...it’s better that people know that I hold the title as Ultimate Assassin now before anyone jumps to the wrong conclusion about me.”

There’s a faraway look in Maki’s eyes as she hides her face by turning her head to the side. Maybe she’s not the sort of person who likes eye contact? Kirumi looks deep in thought for a moment and the longer she’s quiet, the more stiff Maki becomes. Is she perhaps nervous that Kirumi might disapprove of her talent?

“...thank you for being honest,” Kirumi says. The maid has a neutral expression on her face as Maki barely suppresses an eyebrow raise. “To tell you the truth I am surprised that Shirogane *was* telling the truth about your talent but, well, it is simply not my place to judge someone because of what title they hold.”

“Do you not...see me as a threat?” Maki asks quietly.

Kirumi shakes her head. “If you become a threat then I’ll treat you as one. That’s all I have to say regarding the matter.”

“Don’t you think you’re being a little harsh?” Kaito quickly intervenes. “I don’t think Harukawa-”

“I don’t need you defending me on my behalf,” Maki says before looking up at him with a serious look in her eyes. “Besides, it’s a fair response.”

Kaito abruptly snaps his mouth shut. Oh. It seems Maki doesn’t want him defending her then. He

was only trying to help! After all, he just has this gut feeling that Maki is a good person despite her talent. If what she's saying is true about Tsumugi and her wanting to host some sort of twisted killing game then if Maki was truly a bad person she would've just killed everyone and left already. The fact that an *assassin* out of all people is trying to warn everyone about a potential killing spree...it says a lot about Maki as a person.

Maki eyes the chair under the door handle with a look of disdain before sighing loudly. "Once Angie and Gonta return with a first aid kit we'll give it to Shirogane so she can patch herself up. Whilst she's doing that we'll find everyone else and I'll be able to finally tell you all what's going on."

"You're making it sound like there's something else that we should all be worrying about," Kirumi says. "Which says a lot if there's something more serious than a potential killing game to worry about."

Maki grimaces and starts to massage her forehead with a finger and thumb. "There's...a lot that you all don't know."

"Yeah, well, I'm sure things can't be that bad, right?" Kaito responds cheerfully in an attempt to lighten the mood. His grin wavers as Maki doesn't even try to offer him a hint of a smile. "Right?"

"I think that maybe..." Maki murmurs quietly, "as long as you keep being your optimistic self, things might not be so bad..."

Something in his chest flutters. Kaito's grin is instantly brought back to life, fuelled by Maki's words. "That's the spirit-"

"Do you know everyone here?" Kirumi suddenly asks. "Ah, actually, let me rephrase that. Have we met before, Harukawa? What you just said makes it sound like you know Momota on a more personal level but..."

Maki fiddles with one of her pigtails before answering with a delicate voice. "That's right, we've all met before. However, none of you remember me but I remember all of you."

Kirumi almost seems to wince. "Oh...my apologies. Truthfully I'm not sure why I seem to lack a couple of memories at the moment but I hope I haven't caused you any distress by not remembering you-"

"Stop." Maki holds a hand up before sighing. "Don't apologise. It's not your fault that no one here remembers me. I rather you don't pity me."

Kaito purses his lips. "Hey, how come Shirogane seems to know who you are but not us?"

"It's a long story," Maki says before suddenly straightening her back. Kaito raises an eyebrow before finally noticing Angie and Gonta approaching the dormitory. Woah, if Maki hadn't just tensed up then he probably wouldn't have thought to look for them until they were literally at the door. "Which I will tell later. Now, stand back. I'm gonna place the first aid kit in Shirogane's bedroom and I don't know how she's going to react when I open her bedroom door."

Both Angie and Gonta enter looking a little more relaxed. Gonta is the one who passes a small white box to Maki, who thanks him quietly. As Maki carefully tugs the chair away from the door, Kaito turns his attention to Angie and Gonta, who have started to talk to Kirumi.

"Angie found more people!" Angie announces cheerfully, throwing her hands up into the air with an excited cheer. "Angie heard people talking in a different room and she ended up finding a dining

room with people inside!”

“And Gonta found first aid kit very quick!” Gonta proudly adds with a pleased smile. “Sorry we gone so long, we decided to introduce ourselves to everyone in dining room. Everyone seem like nice people, although one person did tell Gonta she would flip Gonta if she caught Gonta doing something...something dee-gen-a-rate?”

Angie clasps her hands together. “Angie is relieved that her God has put her in a place with *some* trustworthy people! Angie was worried that she had woken up with only scary people but now she’s feeling so much better!”

Clearly Maki overhears Angie as she puffs her cheeks out ever so slightly but chooses to stay quiet. She does, however, ask Angie how many people she found inside of the dining room.

“Um, there were four of them,” Angie answers. “Three boys and one girl. Well, Angie thinks that the robot is a boy but Angie isn’t sure. Angie should totally ask if Kiibo wants to be called a female or male later.”

“Kiibo likes to be seen as a male,” Maki quickly responds. When Angie tilts her head with a confused smile, Maki expands. “I already know who Kiibo is and he said he likes to see himself as a male.”

“Oh, Angie sees!” Angie holds her hands behind her back. “Um, how do you already know Kiibo?”

It seems that Maki is too impatient to once again repeat herself that she’ll explain everything to everyone in due time. The assassin simply sighs and leaves the room, clearly expecting everyone to follow after her.

Kaito almost falls over his feet keeping up with her. Maki walks incredibly quickly towards the school and is polite enough to hold the door open for everyone. He can’t help but notice the slight crease in between her brows as she waits for him to step inside.

“Hey, is everything okay?” Kaito asks her.

Maki taps her fingers against the door with a slight scowl. Everyone else has gone on ahead. “I...” She starts to chew on the tip of her thumb. “I’m starting to think I really didn’t think all of this through properly.”

“Oh?” Kaito checks how far away everyone is. They’re a far enough distance that they won’t hear him if he speaks quietly but one of them is eventually going to turn around and wonder where both he and Maki are. Still, that doesn’t stop him from leaning closer and ask, “you wanna talk, just you and me?”

“I’m not sure if that’s a good idea,” Maki admits quietly. When she notices Kaito blink at her response, she grimaces. “It’s just...I came here by choice but at the same time it was also a split second decision. Now that I’m here and have promised to tell everyone everything, I’ve just realised how...bad some things are going to sound.”

Kaito hums. “But still, you’re like one of the only people who knows what is going on and I think everyone deserves to at least know that they’re safe. We *are* safe, right?”

The silence that follows causes anxiety to bubble in his stomach. “...let’s just find everyone else.”

“H-Hey, Harukawa!” Kaito catches the door as she lets it go, pouting as she storms on ahead. She

pushes past Kirumi a little too roughly, causing her to almost stumble into the wall. The maid elegantly catches herself but she does raise an eyebrow.

He can hear people talking inside of the dining room as the small group gets closer. Even though the dining room doors are closed, Kaito easily hears someone dramatically talking rather loudly.

“She practically teleported!” The voice exclaims. “One minute she was standing next to this guy with the shittiest haircut I’ve ever seen and the next she’s holding up the weird girl I told you about by her throat! *With one hand!*”

“Tenko thinks you’re talking absolute nonsense! People can’t teleport!”

“She totally did! I swear! Kiiboy, tell her that the scary girl teleported!”

“No she did not, Ouma. She simply ran very quickly.”

“What Tenko wants to know is why this girl you’re on about just...randomly attacked the other girl.”

“I wouldn’t say she attacked her-”

“Kiiboy, she literally held her up in the air by her throat! She said she was only restraining her but no normal person would apprehend someone by the throat with a single hand! The fact that she looked a little too comfortable with holding her up too is also a major red flag. Something tells me that this isn’t the first time that girl has tried to choke someone out before.”

“S-She wasn’t choking the other girl...she was just...”

“I mean...the scary girl did say the other girl wants us all to kill each other so-”

“You *degenerate!* You should’ve told Tenko that at the start of the conversation! Not now!”

Kaito swears he sees a vein pop up on Maki’s head as she starts to massage her face with an exhausted grimace. She pushes open the door and the room instantly becomes silent. Straight away Kaito spots the small purple haired boy from earlier sitting on a chair whilst a girl with wavy pigtails dabs at his nose with a cloth. Kiibo is hovering near them both whilst a guy with very long hair sits across from them.

“Oh?” The guy with the long hair gestures towards the door. “Is that the scary girl you were on about, Ouma?”

Ouma, (that’s his last name, right? Kaito wonders what his first name is) looks comically surprised before nodding. “Yep!”

Straight away the girl with wavy pigtails, Tenko he thinks, turns around, faces Maki and asks, “is it true that you actually tried to strangle someone to death or is this degenerate telling fibs?”

“I didn’t try to strangle someone to death,” Maki deadpans. She crosses her arms and Kaito spots her flexing the hand that was around Tsumugi’s throat. “I was simply apprehending someone.”

“By wrapping your hand around a girl’s throat,” Ouma points out, pulling a face when Maki glares at him. “What? It’s what I *saw!*”

Almost instantly Kaito sees Maki’s jaw tighten and it doesn’t take a genius to figure out that Maki really, really doesn’t like the purple haired boy sitting in front of her. Maki repeats herself slowly.

“I. Was. Apprehending. Her.”

A genuine look of surprise flashes in Ouma’s eyes before he uncomfortably looks away. Kaito can’t help but notice that Ouma is slowly positioning himself so that more of him than not is behind Tenko. “Okay, okay. Geez, don’t need to get all emotional about it.”

Kiibo thankfully breaks the awkward silence by asking, “is this everyone?”

His words work like magic and Maki’s jaw slowly unlocks as she scans the room. “Yes, this is everyone.”

“Huh, Tenko doesn’t know why but she feels like there should be more of us here,” Tenko admits. “When Angie told Tenko that there were more of you outside she kind of presumed she meant a lot of people, not just five.”

“There’s also another girl here with us,” Kirumi tells her. “But due to circumstances it’s been decided that she should remain inside of her bedroom until further notice for the safety of everyone here.”

“Eh? Why?” Tenko frowns. “Wait, is this the same girl who wants us all to kill each other?!”

“How much do you know?” Maki asks.

“Not much,” the guy with the long hair reveals. “Only that no one knows where we are and that there was an altercation outside earlier.”

“And that apparently we’re all literally in danger!” Tenko adds heatedly. “Um, hello?! Why is no one talking about the fact someone wants us all to kill each other?! Why would someone want us to do such a horrible thing?!”

“Calm down,” Maki sighs. She eyes the table. “Look, everyone just sit down and I’ll explain everything, okay? Just...hurry up and introduce yourselves to each other so things don’t get complicated.”

Maki ends up standing at the end of the table with her arms crossed as everyone quickly introduces themselves to each other. At least Kaito now knows everyone’s names. He rocks back on his chair almost lazily as the room once again becomes silent. Everyone turns to look at Maki expectantly.

He can’t help but feel bad for Maki as she suddenly looks a little lost. If she crosses her arms any tighter then she’s going to cut the blood circulation from them. She looks out of one of the windows with a distant look in her eyes.

“I suppose I should introduce myself,” Maki says and Kaito watches her throat bob as she swallows. “My name is Maki Harukawa and to avoid any nasty surprises, I want to let you all know that...I was given the title of Ultimate Assassin.”

Kaito hears a couple of surprised murmurs, mostly from the people who didn’t know about her talent already. He spots Kiibo’s eyes go wide and Kokichi tense up but aside from that, no one reacts too negatively.

“Ultimate Assassin, hmm?” Korekiyo starts to rub his chin. “How interesting. I’m surprised that an assassin is trying to warn us about a potential killing game. It seems rather out of character.”

Maki bristles almost violently at the word ‘character.’

“Are you okay, Harukawa?” Kaito asks before he can stop himself.

“I’m fine.” Maki clears her throat. “I just want to make it clear that I don’t want any of you to see me as a threat. I want you all to see me as your ally. I don’t intend to kill anyone here.”

From behind him, Kaito can hear Kokichi mumble to himself. “No wonder she was able to pick up Shirogane so flawlessly...”

If Maki hears Kokichi then she doesn’t make it obvious. “From the sounds of it you all already know that Tsumugi Shirogane has brought you all here in an attempt to get you all to kill each other. She wants you all to play a game that’s known as...” Maki frowns. “*Danganronpa*. However, that’s only the name of the game. What she intended to happen was for us all to slowly kill each other one by one and have us try to figure out who the killer is when someone dies.”

Gonta looks horrified. “That doesn’t sound like game! That sounds like torture!”

“He’s not wrong,” Kiibo agrees. “Why on earth would Shirogane want to put us through such a thing?”

“For entertainment,” Maki reveals.

“For whose entertainment, exactly?” Kokichi presses. He taps his fingers against the dining room table impatiently.

Maki pauses before saying, “for her own entertainment and...”

“And?” Korekiyo prompts.

“...and for the audience watching,” Maki answers. She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. “There’s an audience for games like these and...even though I thought the outside world didn’t want any more killing games, enough people stayed tuned in to watch the glitches play out...” Her hands start to tremble.

“What do you mean by glitches?” Kirumi asks.

“We’re all currently in a simulation,” Maki says. “So people don’t actually die, Danganronpa is experienced through a simulation. All of us here are currently hooked up to a computer.”

“Eh?!” Gonta blinks. “Gonta doesn’t think he understands! What do you mean we in simulation?!”

“Imagine that...you’re stuck in some sort of video game,” Maki tells him. “Video games include characters. We’re essentially characters inside of a game. Think of it that way.”

“This is...very hard for Tenko to wrap her head around,” Tenko says as she nervously presses two fingers together. “Tenko doesn’t *feel* like she’s in a simulation.”

“Also Ouma bled earlier when Shirogane hit him,” Kiibo points out. “If we’re in a simulation then that shouldn’t be possible, right? I saw with my own eyes blood come from his nose.”

“The simulation we’re all in is incredibly advanced,” Maki explains. “If you didn’t know you were in a simulation then you wouldn’t guess that you were ever in one in the first place. We’re in essentially a real life simulator. We’re designed to feel hungry, bleed...our bodies inside of the simulation need to be looked after as if they’re our actual bodies. It’s...really, really complicated.”

“It certainly sounds like it,” Kirumi agrees. “But I’m afraid I’m still incredibly confused. Why are

we all in a simulation?”

“And what are those glitches that you were on about?” Kokichi adds.

“Hey, don’t overwhelm her with questions!” Kaito quickly interjects. “One at a time!”

Instead of huffing, Maki looks rather grateful for Kaito intervening. Kaito smiles at her and offers her a subtle thumbs up. “We’re all in a simulation because, well...the truth is we all agreed to participate in Danganronpa.”

Kaito almost chokes on his next breath. “*W-What?!*”

“I certainly don’t remember agreeing to participate in a killing game,” Korekiyo says. He raises an eyebrow. “Although I am fairly certain that I’m missing a couple of memories. I don’t remember how I got here at all.”

“And I don’t remember entering a simulation,” Kiibo adds.

“We were programmed not to remember,” Maki responds. “There’s a way that our memories can be altered using something that’s called a flashback light. A flashback light has the ability to give us memories as well as take them away too. However...”

She starts to nervously play with her hair. Kaito can’t help but think she’s wearing the expression of someone who is about to reveal some very bad news. His lips go thin as he sucks in a tense breath.

“There’s a glitch that has been...causing the simulation to loop,” Maki explains, desperately trying her best to avoid eye contact with everyone. “This...technically isn’t the first time you’ve all woken up here.”

“...huh?” Angie pulls a face. “Um, what does Harukawa mean? Because, like, Angie knows this is the first time she has woken up here so-”

“You’re wrong,” Maki interjects. “You don’t remember but this is the fourth time now you’ve all woken up here completely clueless about where you are. There was only ever supposed to be one game and everyone was supposed to wake up after it finished but a glitch happened that caused everyone who died to wake up here again-”

“We’ve all *died* before?!” Tenko cries out incredulously, throwing her hands up in the air with a panicked look on her face. “T-That’s impossible! Tenko refuses to believe that-”

Maki grimaces, almost looking like she’s in pain as she says, “I’m telling the truth. How the game is supposed to work is that once you die, you wake up outside of the simulation. Instead, when people have died inside of the simulation they just...don’t wake up. They end up having to participate in another killing game.”

“And the people who ended up surviving these supposed killing games?” Korekiyo prompts.

“They woke up,” Maki answers. “If someone survives a killing game then they’re considered as someone who has graduated from the game.”

“Has Harukawa survived killing game before?” Gonta asks.

Maki nods with a slight hum. “Yeah, that’s right.”

“So you’ve been in this simulation before?” Kirumi frowns. “Does that mean people who manage to leave the simulation get to keep their memories but people who die don’t?”

“I think so. From what I’ve seen, I think there’s a chance you all might have some sort of feeling of déjà vu if you interact with certain things or certain people. I’m not entirely sure if there’s actually a way for you all to remember any of the previous games,” Maki admits. “Although I doubt any of you would actually want to remember what it’s like to die.”

“Ah, hold on for just a moment,” Korekiyo says as he holds up a hand. “Harukawa, have you been watching the previous games we’ve been in?”

“Yes I have,” Maki tells him. “Why?”

“Is this perhaps the first time you’ve re-entered the simulation we’re all trapped in to warn us about Shirogane and her desire for a killing game?” Korekiyo asks. He tilts his head to the side ever so slightly as Maki freezes.

“...that’s...that’s right,” Maki responds.

“Hmm, I had a feeling that was the case,” Korekiyo says. “Although now I’m curious as to why you haven’t tried to warn us a lot earlier about Shirogane and her killing games. You said that this is the fourth time we’ve all woken up here, correct? That means we’ve all participated in three separate killing games.”

“Shinguji? Where are you going with this?” Kiibo asks.

Korekiyo shrugs. “I just find it peculiar why Harukawa is trying to protect us from Shirogane *now* when she’s clearly had plenty of earlier opportunities to try to keep us safe. Harukawa, which game did you survive?”

“The...” Maki winces. “The first one. But-”

“Woah, so if you’re right about us being in some sort of crazy killing game simulator, you’ve just been watching us all kill each other instead of trying to give us a heads up?” Kokichi asks. He stops drumming his fingers against the table. “You want us to trust you even though you could’ve warned us a hell of a lot earlier?”

“It’s not like you remember anything you went through,” Maki snaps. Kaito can’t help but think her anger is directed more towards Kokichi than anyone else. However, when several people recoil at her harsh words, Maki suddenly pales. “Wait, I didn’t mean-”

“Is this the first time you’ve re-entered the simulation?” Kirumi questions, obviously trying to diffuse the tense atmosphere that has started to take over the room.

A guilty look flickers in Maki’s eyes before she nods silently, her fists clenched by her sides. “Yes, I’ll be honest that this is the first time that I’ve re-entered the simulation.”

“And...what about the other survivors? Has anyone else tried to warn us before?” Kiibo asks quietly.

Kaito can’t help but shudder when Maki hesitates before she shakes her head slowly. Something just doesn’t sit right with him at all. If he knew that people were going through hell then he’d do anything to warn and protect them, right? Just one look at Maki makes him believe that all she wants is to keep everyone safe but...did she really just let everyone trapped here suffer for so long for no reason? That can’t be right!

“...the first time the game ended, everyone who survived was confused,” Maki says meekly.

“There was only three of us. We didn’t know where we were or that we were even in a simulation in the first place. It took us hours to gather our bearings and by the time even one of us managed to get the energy to do anything, we realised that another game had started.”

“Then why didn’t you log yourself back in as soon as-”

“We were all *scared*, okay?” Maki looks defeated as she hangs her head in shame. “We were all scared...”

She looks devastated, almost embarrassed as she curls in on herself. The way she tries to hide away from everyone makes Kaito want to stand in front of her and block her from everyone’s sight. It’s painfully obvious that she’s in a vulnerable state of mind right now. Maki’s earlier words bounce around his head. She told him she clearly didn’t think things through properly. Her re-entering the simulation was probably a hasty split second decision. He doesn’t know how he feels about that.

However, he knows that he doesn’t want to condemn her for being scared. It must’ve taken a lot of courage to tell everyone that she was scared, that she probably still *is*. He wants to believe that she isn’t lying, that she truly is trying to keep everyone safe. That she wants to try her best to protect everyone now.

“Well you’re here now,” Kaito tells her, smiling encouragingly as Maki slowly lifts her head up to stare at him. “The fact you’re here right now trying to keep us safe is all that matters.”

“Is it really though?” Korekiyo muses. “Harukawa hasn’t provided us with any evidence yet that these supposed killing games even happened in the first place. How do we know she isn’t trying to spin us a sob story so she can lure us into a false sense of security?”

“Why would she want to do that?!” Kaito retorts incredulously.

“She’s an assassin and we don’t remember how we got here,” Korekiyo responds. “Or why we’re actually here. For all we know perhaps we’re simply her next targets.”

Kaito barely manages to restrain himself but he does end up sending his chair flying as he stands up abruptly, his fist shaking as he shouts, “what the hell man?! Harukawa is the only person here offering us any sort of explanation as to why we’re even here-”

“And we’re supposed to just trust her right away?” Korekiyo counters. “The same girl who attacked someone mere moments after we all had woken up?”

“Hey! She said she was apprehending a threat,” Tenko argues, narrowing her eyes. “Don’t be so rude!”

“I am simply making an observation,” Korekiyo tells her. “There’s no need to be so hostile.”

“Gonta think she most likely telling truth,” Gonta admits with a wince. “Although Gonta no like idea of us being in such a scary situation. Since Harukawa warn us about game early on then maybe there chance that we can prevent it from happening?”

“We don’t even know if these games have even happened,” Kirumi points out. “I don’t wish to doubt Harukawa but...”

“Everyone check your pockets, at least one of you should hopefully have a tablet,” Maki suddenly says.

Kaito blinks before doing as she says, checking his pockets. He finds that they're all empty and pouts. It turns out a lot of people have empty pockets, although thankfully Korekiyo seems to have a tablet tucked away in his jacket. He places it onto the table and looks at Maki expectantly.

The assassin carefully picks up the tablet and starts to go through it silently before placing it back down onto the table. On the screen shows a list of sixteen students. Maki points at the screen quietly. It seems that she's opened up a profile for a student called Kaede Akamatsu.

"Look," Maki says as she taps the screen. "It says that this student has graduated, meaning she survived a killing game. However, if we press a profile of someone who is here..." Maki presses down on Kaito's picture. His profile doesn't mention anything about him graduating. "It doesn't say that Momota has graduated. That's because he hasn't made it to the end of a killing game or has left the simulation."

"Oh? Do you not have to survive to leave?" Angie asks. "But Angie thought Harukawa said in order to leave you have to survive a killing game?"

"That's correct but it was found out very recently that there's another way to leave," Maki reveals. "Have you all seen the giant crack in the wall outside?"

"You mean that strange grey slab?" Gonta asks.

Maki nods. "Yeah, that. That's actually a hole in the wall but Shirogane did something to turn the exit around the wall off. We're actually supposed to be able to step through the hole but due to circumstances that won't be possible for a little while."

"This is getting so confusing," Tenko mumbles to herself.

"Hold on just a moment," Kiibo says. He looks incredibly confused. "If we can just leave the game by heading through the hole then why has there been three killing games? You told us that we've all died before so I'm presuming we've all killed each other several times but--"

"The hole was only just made," Maki tells him. "It was only figured out in the previous loop that it is another exit. I'm hoping that Iruma will be able to activate the wall once more so we can all leave."

"Um, who is Iruma?" Kiibo asks curiously.

Kaito swears that Maki looks almost sympathetic for a second. "She's the Ultimate Inventor and someone who managed to leave during the last game. If anyone is able to figure out how to turn the wall back on, it's her."

"So..." Tenko pulls a face. "Are we just waiting for Iruma to...fix the wall so we can all leave?"

Maki pauses. "Oh. I...suppose we are."

"So let me get this straight," Kokichi says, cupping his chin with his hand as he leans onto the table. "You're telling me that we're stuck in some strange simulation and that a girl called Shirogane wants us all to kill each other for entertainment? And that there's been three games so far and during these three games, people have been watching us kill each other for fun?"

It's almost comical how quickly a frown appears on Maki's face. She responds through gritted teeth. "Yes, that is literally what I have just explained to everyone. What? Are you going to accuse me of lying?"

“No,” Kokichi says, “I actually do believe you. *Buuut...*”

Maki narrows her eyes. “But what?”

“You clearly want us to trust you but you literally just said it yourself that you let three games happen and didn’t even try to put a stop to any of them,” Kokichi tells her. He tilts his head to the side with a crooked smile. “That was kind of mean of you, Harukawa-chan.”

“Don’t you dare make it sound like I’m in the wrong,” Maki hisses. Her eyes shine dangerously. “We didn’t know if it was safe to re-enter the game. I took a big risk re-entering today. I blindly followed Shirogane back into the game because I saw her log back in and even though I didn’t know what was going to happen to me...”

“Oh? So you only returned because Shirogane did?” Kokichi asks. Maki’s entire posture goes rigid. “Wow, you’re making it sound like no one actually planned to come and give us a heads up in the first place.”

“We had talked about it,” Maki argues. “We were just waiting for the right time. We were waiting for someone to find a way to make it so that more than two people can leave at a time-”

“Hmm? Didn’t Harukawa say three people survived her game?” Angie hums. “Angie is totally getting confused.”

Maki’s nostrils flare as she closes her eyes, evidently struggling to keep calm. “The supposed only way for a killing game to end is for there to be two survivors. Once there’s only two people left, the simulation automatically ends. Three people made it to the end of the first game but the entire wall had also been destroyed. All three of us stepped past it and left the simulation but none of us were sure if it was just a fluke so-”

“So you knew going past the wall was a viable way for us to leave but decided not to re-enter to take the wall down and try going past it again?” Korekiyo sounds horribly accusing.

“Harukawa already told us that she and everyone else were too scared to go back inside of the simulation!” Kaito argues.

“It was too big of a risk,” Maki murmurs. “We just...hoped that someone else would try to break the wall down and leave through it. I didn’t...I didn’t want to re-enter the simulation and end up dying. I would’ve lost all my memories and...”

“Oh, so it’s okay for all of us to continuously get our memories wiped but God forbid you lose your memories,” Kokichi says, rolling his eyes.

“Well maybe if you tried a little harder to survive then you wouldn’t have forgotten so much,” Maki spits.

“Woah, woah, woah...” Kaito puts a hand on Maki’s shoulder. “How about we all take a deep breath and-”

“I’m trying to help you all yet I’m being treated like a villain,” Maki hisses, shrugging his hand from her shoulder. “I don’t know what you all want me to say. I’m...I’m *sorry* that it’s taken until now for someone to explain everything to you all but none of you understand the severity of the situation. None of you have had to watch...someone you really care about die over and over again. All of you don’t remember what it’s like to go through a killing game.”

“P-Please don’t look so sad!” Gonta pleads. “Gonta sorry he doesn’t remember! Gonta will try

really hard to remember something so Harukawa not the only person who has to have horrible memories!”

“It...It doesn’t work like that,” Maki tells him gently. The corner of her lips turn upwards into a fleeting sad smile. “Besides, maybe you’re all the lucky ones for not having to deal with such horrible memories.”

She’s clearly had enough because before anyone else can say anything, Maki leaves the room without another word. Kaito can’t help but think that she probably had a lot more to tell everyone but she’s far too overwhelmed to continue. The silence that follows her departure is almost deafening.

“So...” Kiibo wrings his hands together nervously. “It seems that...”

“We’re in a very fucked up situation,” Kokichi finishes for him.

“Mind your language,” Tenko mumbles.

“So are we, like, believing what Harukawa told us then?” Angie asks. “Because Angie’s God was taking a nap so he doesn’t know how to respond to all of this.”

“I do think Harukawa is telling the truth,” Kirumi tells her. “However, I must admit that the fact that it has taken this long for someone to actually try and put a stop to a killing game from happening in the first place makes me feel rather...put off.”

Kaito sighs loudly. “C’mon guys, you heard her. Would you all want to re-enter a simulation when you know that there’s a chance you might be killed?”

“Oh please,” Kokichi says with a scoff. “Harukawa told us that she’s the Ultimate Assassin. She has no reason to worry about things like that. She and everyone else who survived are simply cowards.”

“Ouma, don’t you think you’re being a little harsh?” Kiibo says. “If she didn’t know if breaking the wall and leaving through it was definitely going to work then the most logical thing for her to do was to wait to see if it works. Since she said that the wall was recently broken then that means she decided to help us out at her earliest convenience-”

“Her earliest convenience would’ve been the moment she and everyone else who has survived knew that we’re all in some sort of looping glitch,” Korekiyo retorts. He sighs. “It’s such a shame all of our memories have been wiped. I would love to be able to remember the other loops I’ve been in.”

“You want to remember what it’s like to die?!” Tenko pulls a face. “You’re weird.”

Kirumi lets out an exasperated sigh. “I understand that everyone is probably scared right now but let’s please refrain from starting any arguments with each other. It would be in our best interest to cooperate with each other if there truly is a chance that we might be forced to participate in a killing game.”

“Gonta thought since Harukawa locked Shirogane away, no killing game will happen?” Gonta says. “Killing game can’t start if Shirogane isn’t able to do anything.”

“If Shirogane is as deranged as Harukawa is making her out to be then I doubt she’s just going to sit around in her bedroom twiddling her thumbs for the next couple of days,” Kokichi tells him with a sigh.

“So...are we all still in danger?” Gonta asks hesitantly. “Gonta promise he no kill anyone here! Gonta gentleman and gentleman never kill!”

“The fact you’re here implies that you might’ve turned to murder before,” Korekiyo points out, causing Gonta’s eyes to go wide.

“R-Really?” Gonta starts to chew on his lip. “But...”

“Dude, saying things like that is *not* helpful!” Kaito groans. He scratches the back of his head with a sigh. “Guys, can we all just fucking chill out for just a second? Clearly the situation we’re all in is a lot worse than anticipated-”

“Are you seriously telling Tenko to be calm when there’s a chance that someone might force her to kill someone?!” A light film of cold sweat starts to grow on the girl’s forehead.

“You don’t have to kill someone,” Angie tells her. “Like, from the sounds of it Shirogane is just gonna tell us all to kill each other. We don’t have to listen to her.”

“Shirogane will probably have some sort of incentive to give us all to encourage us,” Kirumi responds.

“Harukawa has already sorted Shirogane out so we don’t have to worry about her!” Kaito points out. “So-”

“Are you stupid?” Kokichi raises an eyebrow. “From the sounds of it all Harukawa has done is put Shirogane in her room like she’s some sort of naughty child. What? Are we just going to expect her to sit around whilst we wait for a so-called exit to appear?”

Kaito huffs and he feels his cheeks heat up. “I’m not stupid! I just think that-”

“It would be unwise of us all to put our entire trust into Harukawa,” Korekiyo suddenly says. “After all, she did reveal to us all that she’s the Ultimate Assassin. If things do go south and a killing game does start, she could easily just kill us all and escape. She seems very protective of her memories. I have no doubt that she would do anything to keep them.”

“Why would you say that?! Harukawa is on our side!” Kaito retorts. “Just because she’s the Ultimate Assassin doesn’t mean she’s dangerous!”

“Why are you defending her so much?” Angie asks. “It’s not like you know each other, right?”

Kaito can’t help but feel frustrated. He grinds his fists together as a way to comfort himself. “She just looks like the sort of person who looks scary on the outside but is a good person deep down.”

Kokichi snorts. “What? So you want us to trust her because you *think* she’s a good person? Every time I open my mouth she looks like she wants to kill me.”

“W-Well...” Kaito falters before clearing his throat. “She’s probably just really stressed right now! She’s just admitted that she had to watch us all go through three separate killing games. She’s probably super fragile right now-”

“If she and everyone else who has survived a killing game actually cared about us then they would’ve saved us a long time ago,” Angie says. “God is telling Angie that we can’t trust anyone who lets people suffer for no reason.”

“Tenko thinks you’re being a little too harsh,” Tenko admits. “Tenko thinks if she was Harukawa

right now then she'd be scared. We don't know what she and everyone else outside of the simulation has had to put up with. From the sounds of things, they haven't been having a good time either."

"But they haven't had to kill each other over and over. They've simply had the luxury of observing our suffering from somewhere safe," Korekiyo says.

"I understand that some of you are frustrated but the situation sounds a lot more complicated than some of you are making it out to be," Kirumi intervenes. She clasps her hands down her waist.

"What's important is that we're being helped now. As blunt as Harukawa was earlier, thankfully we don't remember any of the horrors that we've been put through. Harukawa, on the other hand, remembers everything."

"She probably feel really horrible," Gonta murmurs sympathetically. "Least we can all do is be nice to her. She probably struggling a lot right now."

"I suppose her explanation as to why it's taken her so long to warn us is also logical in a way," Kiibo adds, rubbing his chin. "We should perhaps be more grateful that she's cooperating fully with us now too."

Korekiyo hums quietly. "I do suppose things could be worse right now. However, I simply don't think I can trust a girl like Harukawa. I don't like her."

"You don't have to like her," Kirumi says as Tenko starts to growl lowly at the anthropologist. "I just think we should be a little less hostile towards her."

"I'll be less hostile towards her if she's less hostile towards me," Kokichi grumbles, crossing his arms and slouching down his chair with a pout. "Telling me that I should've tried harder to survive...how rude of her."

Kaito sighs, running a hand down his face. At least everyone is being a little more civil now. It just frustrates him that some people are being so unfair right now. Maki clearly isn't the enemy here! She's trying to keep everyone safe. His eyes flicker to the dining room doors and before anyone can stop him, Kaito says, "I'm gonna see if Harukawa is okay."

He leaves before anyone can respond, a faint grimace on his face as he heads out of the dining room. Straight away it feels like he can breathe a little easier once he's away from everyone. Sure, the situation everyone in is fucked right now but fuck, why is everyone being so awkward? Without Maki filling everyone in, everyone would be clueless right now. Maybe Tsumugi would've already tried to start her killing game if Maki hadn't intervened. Everyone should be thanking Maki right now, not upsetting her!

Kaito blinks as he spots Maki leave the girl's bathroom, dusting her hands off by slapping them together as she steps into the hallway. She does seem a little surprised when she spots him but instead of turning her head away like he expects her to do, she instead waits for him to get closer.

"Hey, you okay?" Kaito asks and his hand twitches by his side. He really wants to put his hand on shoulder to comfort her. "You sounded really upset earlier." He frowns. "Everyone was out of place for treating you so harshly. Of course it doesn't matter that it took you a while to re-enter the simulation! You're here now and that's all that matters."

"But not everyone else sees it that way," Maki responds with a bitter smile. She gestures for him to stay quiet as he opens his mouth. "Momota, you don't have to comfort me. I knew that I wasn't going to get a positive reaction from everyone in the first place."

“That doesn’t excuse how rude some people were to you,” Kaito says. “You’re only trying to help!”

“...but they are right in a way,” Maki mumbles so softly that Kaito almost misses her. “It’s...bad that it took this long for a survivor to come back and help. It’s just...”

The distant look in her eyes is the only explanation Kaito needs. Sure he’s confused right now, very confused. He really doesn’t fully understand what’s going on but what he does understand is that Maki is trying to protect everyone so that’s what he’s going to focus on. He wants to trust her despite not knowing who she really is. Something deep down inside of him is screaming at him that Maki is a friend, not a foe.

He...he really believes in her. He wants her to know that.

“Hey, chin up!” Kaito pumps one of his fists enthusiastically. “You came here to keep everyone safe and that’s what you’re doing. So what if a couple of people are being awkward right now? If they continue to be awkward then I’ll deal with them! You just focus on what you need to do! I believe in you!”

To his surprise, Maki doesn’t quirk the corners of her mouth up into that little amused smile he’s seen her do. She doesn’t thank him. She doesn’t huff and turn her head away.

Instead, Maki starts crying.

She must not be aware that there’s warm tears trickling down her cheeks. Instead she looks like she’s almost in some sort of trance as she looks up at Kaito, her eyes wide and glistening. Of course Kaito starts to panic because shit, he didn’t mean to make a girl cry! He puts his hands to his head as he starts to hop around, wondering what on earth he should do when Maki suddenly blinks as a teardrop trickles onto her hand.

Maki jumps and starts to furiously wipe her face with her red shirt sleeves, causing her shirt to go damp as she cleans her face. She looks almost confused as she presses her palms into her eyes, as if she’s trying to forcibly keep any more tears from leaking.

“I-I didn’t mean to make you cry!” Kaito promises. He desperately hopes Tenko doesn’t suddenly appear because he has a feeling that if she finds out he’s made a girl cry then she’ll launch him directly into the sun. “What, ah, what can I do to make you stop?”

“I’m not...I’m not crying,” Maki firmly insists despite Kaito quite literally witnessing her do so. However, Kaito takes the hint to not press any further. He instead crosses his arms and waits for her to calm herself. She’s clearly not hysterical but obviously something is bothering her more than she’s letting on. “I just...” She hides her eyes with her fringe. “I want to see if Shirogane has done anything.”

Maki walks away and Kaito follows her, feeling like a lost puppy. He doesn’t like feeling like a lost puppy because it’s not a manly feeling at all! However he can’t help but feel helpless as Maki heads back outside. He supposes he should be happy that she hasn’t told him to leave but, ugh, he’s not used to being the one that follows someone around. He’s used to people following *him* around!

It’s not like he hates Maki for swooping in and saving the day, of course. He just wishes he could do more to help! It almost feels like his bones are itching as he trails behind Maki. He just wants something to do! He thinks he might combust if he just sits around and does nothing.

He’s so deep in thought that he ends up slamming into Maki’s back, not realising that she has

stopped dead in her tracks. Thankfully, Maki is surprisingly built like a tank so she doesn't even stumble despite him accidentally throwing his entire body weight onto her. She does momentarily scowl at him and he holds his hands up apologetically but she clearly has more important things to worry about.

Kaito wonders what has caught her attention when he spots what she must've caused her to stop so abruptly. Through the glass walls of the dormitory, Kaito spots that there's a very large hole in Tsumugi's wooden bedroom door. He gapes at it whilst Maki's entire face darkens.

"And *this* is why I said we should've restrained her," Maki mutters with a scowl. One of her hands starts to twitch uncontrollably. "Tch, I should've done more to block the door. Where the hell did she go?"

She gets her answer in the form of sudden loud footsteps. Maki snaps her head in the direction of the sound and stalks towards it. Kaito shudders at the...murderous energy that rolls from her in large waves.

"You're not going to do something stupid, right?" Kaito asks hesitantly, following Maki as she storms down the stone steps and towards the lower courtyard.

"I'll assess the situation and do what's necessary," she responds coldly.

Perhaps he should be more panicked by her response but he's instead startled by the sight of four colourful machines leaving what looks to be a sci-fi looking building. A hangar maybe? Maki immediately tenses and purposefully positions herself in front of him. Kaito swears his heart doesn't start to beat just a little quicker.

"For fucks sake," Maki mutters under her breath. Kaito is surprised by her sudden desire to swear. "Stay behind me, got it?"

"But-"

The murderous energy Kaito sensed earlier from Maki doubles as they both spot Tsumugi smugly lead the machines forward, holding what seems to be a...red teddy bear in her hands? Huh? Kaito feels terribly confused as Tsumugi suddenly spots them both and starts to wave.

"Oh! Hi!" Tsumugi acts like she's just bumped into two dear friends. Kaito finds it absolutely bonkers that Tsumugi strolls up to them both casually, clearly not phased by the four machines that are following her. "I wasn't expecting to bump into the two of you out here!"

"What the hell are you doing?" Maki hisses. "And where the hell did you summon more Monokubs?"

"That's none of your business," Tsumugi huffs as she turns her nose on Maki. "I was going to bring Monokuma back but I heard you breaking Motherkuma so of course I had to improvise."

"I'm Monotaro!" The red bear in her hands excitedly announces, causing Kaito to yelp because what the fuck, how is that teddy bear moving on its own?!

"You're *dead*," Maki corrects him with a hiss. A, quite frankly, *terrifying* shadow blocks out most of her face. Her red eyes glow in an almost predatory way through the darkness.

When Maki tries to lunge for Monotaro, Tsumugi tsks almost playfully as she steps back, grinning as the four machines behind her suddenly raise what look to be guns towards the assassin.

“H-Holy shit!” Kaito instinctively wraps his arms around Maki’s shoulders and pulls her back. He can feel her tense up but she doesn’t fight him. “Are those *guns*?!”

“Yep!” Tsumugi happily answers. “These machines are called Exisals and they belong to the Monokubs! There should be five of them but well, you see, *someone* caused Monotaro’s to break! How cruel!”

Monotaro snuffles, wiping his teary eyes. “How cruel indeed!”

“Just beat the shit out of Monodam and take his! It’s not like he deserves it anyway!” The blue Exisal suddenly cackles. “Or better yet, let me beat the shit out of him!”

“Huh?!” Kaito blanches. “Did that Exisal just talk?!”

Tsumugi rolls her eyes. “The Monokubs are inside of them you idiot.”

“Don’t call Momota an idiot,” Maki snaps.

“Yeah, the only idiot around here is Monodam!” The blue Exisal says. “Isn’t that right, Monodam?”

All the attention is drawn to the green Exisal, which stays perfectly still. The silence that follows is incredibly awkward, so much so that even Kaito raises an eyebrow when no one says anything.

“Um, Monodam?” The pink Exisal tilts its body to the side.

“Poor Monodam,” Monotaro snuffles. “The countless years of abuse from Monokid has made it so he can’t even respond to simple questions anymore.”

“He’s closed his robot heart off from all of us,” says the pink Exisal. “He acts more like a distant cousin than a brother.”

“This is ridiculous,” Maki mutters before shrugging out of Kaito’s hold. She starts to head back towards the school.

“Uh, Harukawa? Where are you going?” Tsumugi asks.

Maki ignores her, keeping her back turned on the blue haired girl.

“Hey toots, don’t be so rude!” The yellow Exisal huffs. “Although I do like the vibe she gives off. Mysterious. Desirable. She’s going to cause an influx of new viewers and profits will go through the roof!”

Kaito pulls a face as he slowly backs away. He wants to follow Maki but he can’t lie, he’s a little scared to turn his back on the Exisals, especially since their guns are still raised. “H-Harukawa, do you really think it’s smart to just ignore them?”

“They’re not going to shoot,” Maki tells him.

The assassin then bristles as the blue Exisal sprays the floor with bullets. She spins around and right away Kaito notices that the first thing she looks at is him and then at the floor.

“You fucking sure about that?” The blue Exisal cocks his gun.

Maki glares harshly at Tsumugi. “Do you want to explain what the hell you think you’re playing at?”

“Oh, I didn’t tell Monokid to do that,” Tsumugi says. “But I’m glad he did. I want to see the look on your face when you realise you can’t stop me from starting another killing game. You might’ve thought removing Monokuma from the equation would stop me but you’re forgetting I don’t need him.”

“You’re insecure enough to bring *them* back though,” Maki spits as she gestures towards the Exisals.

“Think of them as...extra security,” Tsumugi says. “Or extra incentive to do as I say. I mean, even I’m not stupid enough to think everyone will start killing each other without any sort of motive. However, I’m pretty sure everyone is smart enough to not defy me if they think an Exisal will punish them.”

“And I like punishing people!” Monokid declares. “If anyone defies me then I’ll peel their limbs from their body like stringed cheese!”

“T-That’s gross!” The pink Exisal whimpers and Kaito swears he hears the sound of someone throwing up inside of the machine.

“Ah! Monophanie threw up!” Monotaro exclaims. “Hey, what colour is your puke, Monophanie?”

“G-Green,” she whimpers.

“Ah, green,” the Yellow Exisal sighs. “Sounds like some real bad is going to happen soon then.”

“Of course something bad is going to happen soon!” Tsumugi declares, putting a hand on her hip and pointing at both Kaito and Maki with a sinister look in her eyes. “Since Harukawa ruined my killing game reveal, I’ll just have to make an even more exciting motive reveal instead!”

“Motive...reveal?” Kaito cocks his head to the side before his eyes go wide. “Wait, you actually *want* to have a killing game? Why?!”

Tsumugi blatantly ignores him as she giggles. “Don’t think everyone is safe just because you warned them about me, Harukawa. I still have plenty of tricks up my sleeve! That’s why I’ve prepared what I call the Ultimate Motive for you all to endure!”

“I don’t care what you’ve prepared,” Maki retorts. “Call your motive whatever you like, none of us are sticking around long enough for you to-”

“Oh? Are you planning on leaving?” Tsumugi asks, grinning as she puts a finger to her lips. “How exactly? It’s not like there’s an exit you can all go through.”

Holy shit. It’s one thing hearing someone warn you that a killing game might happen. It’s another thing to hear with your own ears that someone is going to give everyone a motive to kill. Kaito’s hands start to tremble. “Well even if there’s no exit for us yet, like hell are any of us going to be influenced by your motive!”

“You sure about that, spaceman?” The yellow Exisal asks. “There’s a reason why the motive you’re about to deal with is called the Ultimate Motive!”

“Ooh, you tell him, Monosuke!” Monotaro cheers.

Tsumugi spreads her arms out wide as she explains with a sneer, “I’m going to throw every motive from three different killing games at you all at once! I’m talking videos of your most beloved being taken away.”

“Your most embarrassing secrets being revealed!” Monosuke adds.

“Ten million dollars! Uh, Monocoins,” Monophanie says. “Because we don’t actually have that much money-”

“A promise that if you kill and win a class trial, we’ll tell you how you ended up here,” Monotaro says.

“An arcade machine that we’re going to make as soon as we’re done talking that’ll you’ll all be... dying to play,” Monokid cackles.

Tsumugi’s eyes light up. “A disease so despairing that even I won’t mind catching it!”

“We’ll also be removing all of the food from the kitchen until a murder occurs!” Monosuke says. “Which will certainly boost profits since we won’t have to feed you bastards!”

“A...three day time limit for a murder to occur or everyone will be punished by the Exisals,” Monophanie adds with a shuddery voice. “Please don’t make us have to resort to punishing you all.”

“A video showing your most beloved...” Monotaro pauses. “Eh, wait a minute. Are we going to use the same motive twice?”

Tsumugi ignores him as she flops her hands down by her chest. “A transfer student from the *graaave*...well, actually due to circumstances we can’t actually bring anyone back so instead we’re just going to ignore this motive.”

“Oh how kind of you,” Maki mutters dryly.

“And finally!” Monokid whips out a key card. “This bad boy!”

“That card is useless,” Maki says with a scowl.

“Eh? Really?” Monokid pauses. “Well we’re still going to use it anyway!”

“Christ...” Maki pinches the bridge of her nose with an irritated scowl. “This is so, *so* stupid.”

“The Ultimate Motive is not stupid! It’s motivating!” Tsumugi insists.

“Everyone has dealt with most of these motives before and the ones I haven’t heard of don’t exactly sound all that threatening,” Maki says. “Face it, Shirogane. You’re just making your so-called Ultimate Motive sound worse than it actually is. Have you even put any thought into it at all?”

“Y-Yeah!” Tsumugi splutters. She straightens her back as she clears her throat. “You should be a lot more worried, Harukawa!”

“The only thing I’m remotely worried about is the time limit,” Maki responds. “But I’m more than confident that Iruma will have the wall up and running by then.”

“Oh really?” Tsumugi smiles patiently. “And what if Iruma doesn’t fix the wall in time? What then?”

Maki silently glowers at Tsumugi with such intensity that it even intimidates Kaito. He takes a step forward and all but inserts himself into their conversation. “We won’t ever have to worry about that because I believe that Iruma will fix the wall in time!”

“And what if I just...shorten the time limit?” Tsumugi suggests sleazily.

“Do you want to die?”

Kaito freezes as he slowly turns to look at Maki. If the murderous energy he felt radiating from her before felt doubled, it feels *quadrupled* now. Maki’s hand squeezes the air over and over and Kaito realises straight away that it’s probably taking all of Maki’s patience to stop herself from grabbing Tsumugi’s throat and squeezing hard.

He trusts Maki when she told him earlier that she wasn’t going to let Tsumugi get to her. However, watching Maki glare metaphorical daggers into Tsumugi’s body makes him realise that maybe, just maybe, Maki might need some support to stop herself from snapping.

And Kaito fully intends to help her in any way he can.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so I am going to acknowledge that there's a slight plot hole, which is that the glass wall was fully intact during Kaede's loop but is now currently cracked. I've been trying to keep everything consistent during this story but I can't really do much about this inconsistency ahaha whoops. Admittedly I didn't know I was going to take the route of the wall being broken when I started writing Kaede's loop so ahaha yeah, there's not much I can do about that now :.)

Final Loop - Chapter 1 Part 2

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the slight delay! I had to rewrite this chapter and a couple of scenes several times because I wasn't happy with how it was turning out. I'm a lot more satisfied with what I ended up with though :)

Thanks to everyone who left a comment on the previous chapter and to everyone who left a kudo! They do mean a lot, even if it does take me a couple of days to respond ahaha

Sorry if there are any mistakes. Admittedly I've spent hours rereading this chapter over and over and kept finding tiny mistakes. If there are still any mistakes at this point then aaaaa, whoops :,)

Thanks for reading and I hope you all enjoy my writing!

Have a nice day!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tsumugi taunts everyone with her new motive the first chance she gets.

“I don’t think I could’ve lasted *another second* acting innocent,” Tsumugi admits as everyone stares at her with varying looks of surprise. She’s standing at the head of the table, her arms crossed and four Exisals cramped together right behind her. She still has a tight hold of Monotaro, who waves at the group excitedly. Either he’s incredibly dense or is genuinely pleased to see everyone.

Maki clicks her tongue and quietly mutters, “and *this* is why I wanted to restrain her.”

“So...you actually want us all to kill each other?” Tenko asks nervously, playing with one of her braids absentmindedly. “You’re just kidding, right? This is all just one big joke, *right?!?*”

“Does she look like she’s joking?” Korekiyo responds. His mask twitches as his face shifts. “It’s clear by the look on her face that she most definitely wants blood to be spilt.”

“And you’re...going to essentially torture everyone until someone dies?” Kirumi’s entire face darkens as she stands up. “You know I can’t allow you to-”

Tsumugi snorts before gesturing to the four Exisals behind her. “Are you blind? What are you going to do to stop me, Tojo? If you want to get to me then you’re going to have to get past all the Monokubs first.”

Kirumi pauses, her expression tightening as she looks at the four colourful machines that are all armed with guns and a seemingly limitless supply of bullets. She looks like she’s figuring out what to do next, calculating whether or not she can single-handedly take down all four machines. She looks determined but Kirumi clearly also isn’t stupid as she sits back down reluctantly.

Maki, however, takes a step forward whilst scooping up a butter knife from the table. “The

Monokubs are just annoying target practices anyway.”

“H-Harukawa!” Kaito hisses, grabbing one of her shoulders and jerking her back. “The Monokubs have the Exisals to protect themselves with! Look, I’m not saying you’re not capable but I don’t think it’s very smart to go up against four separate machines-”

Kaito must admit that the situation he’s in, well, everyone is in is *incredibly* frustrating. If the Monokubs didn’t have such powerful machines to hide inside then he would’ve punted them into space by now himself but he’s not entirely brain dead. He knows that one hit from an Exisal will shatter at least one of his bones. He knows the moment one of them starts shooting, someone is going to end up hurt, or worse, dead.

Maki looks like she’s weighing up her options as she spins the knife around her hand slowly. *Threateningly*. She’s clearly warning both Tsumugi and the Monokubs that she too is a threat, a dangerous force of nature that shouldn’t be messed with. Kaito can’t help but feel relieved that Maki seems to like him because he sure as hell doesn’t want to ever end up on her hit list.

Maybe Maki *can* take out all four Exisals and all five Monokubs. But right now? The dining room is currently incredibly crowded at the moment since everyone is still sitting around the table. The four Exisals taking up the rest of the free space aren’t helping either. Kaito thinks it’s a miracle that they even managed to squeeze into the room in the first place. Apparently logic doesn’t exactly exist here at the Ultimate Academy for Gifted Juveniles.

Still, if she starts a fight now then someone is going end up hurt. Maki is more than capable of looking after herself but Kaito doubts the entire group will be able to protect themselves if a fight were to happen. Gonta might be able to protect some people with his large body and Kirumi seems rather capable of defending herself if needed but smaller people like Angie might struggle to keep safe if push comes to shove.

Maki huffs through her nose and stops spinning her knife. Maybe she’s also realised that starting a fight in such a small room is perhaps *not* a very good idea. However, that doesn’t stop her from glaring daggers into Tsumugi. If looks could kill then Tsumugi would be six feet under.

The Ultimate Cosplayer, despite being on the receiving end of a quite frankly terrifying glare, starts to laugh as Maki begrudgingly stands down. “He’s right, Harukawa. Even if you are the Ultimate Assassin, there’s only so much you can do with four machines ready to shoot you down at any moment. All I have to do is tell them to fire and they will.”

“You won’t actually hurt any of us for no reason though, right?” Kiibo asks. It seems that he’s struggling to accept that Tsumugi wants to put everyone through hell for seemingly no other reason than to entertain herself.

Tsumugi cackles as Maki answers for her, saying, “don’t be so naïve, Kiibo. If she doesn’t see a body soon then I don’t doubt she’ll just kill one of us herself.”

“She’s right,” Tsumugi agrees gleefully. “I don’t mind getting my hands dirty.”

“You know, this is starting to sound less like a game and more like just senseless killing for no reason at all,” Kokichi says. “Is a game really a game if you have to force it to happen?”

“Pfft, like the finer details really matter,” Tsumugi dismisses him with a wave of her hand. “What I really want from this entire experience is-”

“For everyone to feel despair,” Maki cuts in, completely blanking Tsumugi as she growls lowly at

her. "Although I suppose making people watch as everyone dies around them is an easy way to make people suffer."

"Um, so like...do we have the option to just leave?" Angie asks, tilting her head to the side.

"Because Angie thinks she totally doesn't want to stay here because she doesn't want to die so..."

"Oh, if you can find an exit then sure, go right ahead and leave," Tsumugi answers.

Gonta blinks before smiling. "So we can just leave if we want? Oh, that's a relief!"

Korekiyo lets out an amused laugh. "She was clearly being sarcastic. From Shirogane's response, I don't think that there's any exit for us to go through that is easy to find."

"And I already told you all that we're in a simulation," Maki says. "The only exit is currently not available right now."

"That's not *truuuue*," Tsumugi coos serenely. "Winning the killing game also guarantees-"

"Keep your pathetic mouth shut," Maki snaps as she spins back around to glare her down for what seems like the millionth time today. "How many times do I have to tell you that-"

"Actually, can I ask a question?" Korekiyo suddenly asks. He's got his tablet in his hand and he starts to scroll through it lazily, using a bandaged finger to tap the screen. "Who on earth is Monokuma? I've seen him mentioned in the rules a couple of times but I don't believe we've met him yet."

"Daddy?" Monophanie excitedly calls from inside her pink Exisal.

"He's our father!" Monotaro excitedly chirps, throwing his tiny red paws out with glee.

"And once he shows up then you fuckers will-" Monokid is abruptly cut off as the yellow Exisal shoves into his own.

"He's not going to show up, dumbass," Monosuke reminds him. "Did you forget what Shirogane said? She told us one of these bastards killed our grandmother, Motherkuma, and now pops is never going to come back!"

Monophanie whimpers. "I-I'll never forgive the bastard who took our daddy away from us!"

"It was her, you know?" Tsumugi tells them as she maliciously points a finger towards Maki.

"She's the one who made sure Motherkuma broke when she got here!"

Maki tenses as all four Exisals turn to face her. "And? There's no rule about breaking Motherkuma."

"...toots does have a point," Monosuke grumbles.

"So? Killing where Papa Kuma came from is basically the same as killing him!" Monokid causes his Exisal to shake erratically. "And I want to test to see how well this," he gestures to his Exisal with one of its mechanical claws, "bad boy works!"

"If you so much as raise your gun at me then I'll make you wish you were dead by the time I'm done with you," Maki hisses, her hand trembling around her knife.

"Are you *threatening me?!'*" Monokid incredulously retorts. "Because-"

“So, like, Angie is reading the rules on Shinguji’s tablet and she totally doesn’t see anything about you guys on it,” Angie says. She must’ve snatched the tablet from the anthropologist’s hands as she’s currently staring down at it, her tongue poking out of her mouth as she concentrates. “This game has rules, yes?”

“I mean, yeah, to make things fair,” Tsumugi says, sounding rather uncaring.

Maki rolls her eyes. “The rules don’t mean shit to you though, Shirogane. Do they?”

“Like...” Tsumugi taps her cheek with one of her blood red fingernails. “Sometimes rules *need* to be bent to make things more interesting but I usually like to follow them when I can...”

“So you’re admitting that you don’t mind cheating if it benefits you?” Kokichi asks before scoffing. “That’s kind of pathetic, Shirogane.”

“Um, *Angie was speaking*,” Angie says with a pout. She raises her voice ever so slightly. “She’s just asking if the rules are even relevant if this Monokuma guy isn’t around to enforce them.”

“Of course they’re still relevant, I’m around to enforce them!” Tsumugi responds.

“Yeah but...” Angie hesitates before twisting her body so it’s shielded a little more by an oblivious Gonta, who smiles down at her when he notices her. “Like...these rules were made by the headmaster, correct?”

“You asking if pops wrote the rules? Because he totally did!” Monosuke says. “He was a super clever guy, let me tell you that. Hey, if he’s not around anymore then when do we get our inheritance?”

“Why does it matter who wrote the rules? I’m still going to enforce them, you know?” Tsumugi says with an impatient sigh. “So-”

“The rules, just...don’t mention anything about it being not allowed to remove you or the Monokubs,” Angie points out quietly. “So, like, Angie isn’t sure whether to see any of you as a threat or not.”

“Oh.” Tsumugi blinks slowly before reaching into her own pocket and pulling out a tablet. She scrolls through it quietly before saying, “well of course you should still see me as a threat-”

“What Angie is pointing out is that I can take every single Monokub and Exisal out,” Maki says as she prowls forwards with a dangerous glint in her eye. “And there’s absolutely nothing you can do about it.”

“T-Then I’ll just make it so...” Tsumugi pauses before she looks down at Monotaro. “You guys are capable of changing the rules, right?”

“Uh, *no*, pops locked us out of his super duper rule changing account,” Monosuke responds with a pout.

“He didn’t think we were responsible enough to play around with the rules,” Monophanie says sadly.

Tsumugi hums quietly as a thoughtful expression appears on her face. “Hmm. Oh well. I mean, I give you all permission to defend yourselves so if anyone does try to hurt you guys-”

“THE-RULES-NEED-TO-BE-FOLLOWED-SO-EVERYONE-CAN-GET-ALONG.”

“Eh?” Monophanie lets out a confused noise as she turns her attention towards the green Exisal.

“The fuck are you on about?” Monokid hisses. “Who cares if these bastards get along-”

“GETTING-ALONG-IS-VERY-IMPORTANT-TO-ME,” Monodam responds quietly.

Kaito blinks slowly. What’s this? An unexpected assist from one of the Monokubs? He raises an eyebrow at Maki, who shrugs in return. He can tell by her rigid posture that even though Monodam is *sort of* being helpful, she still wants to take him out too.

Tsumugi nods as she rubs her chin. “Getting along is very important...after all, what’s worse than watching your friends die one by one?!”

“I don’t think I can think of anything worse,” Kiibo admits before grimacing. “Ah, you were being metaphorical, weren’t you?”

“Hey, is the green Exisal on our side or not?” Angie asks. “Because it sounds like to Angie that he just wants us to get along-”

“Don’t be so naïve,” Maki says. “He wants this killing game just as much as the rest of the Monokubs do. Just because they all have different ideals doesn’t mean they’re not as bad as each other.”

Tsumugi starts to groan. “Ugh...why does this conversation feel like it’s just getting dragged out? I’m *boored*. Let’s just get the motive ready for everyone already! Who cares about the rules? The Monokubs aren’t going to leave their Exisals anytime soon so as long as they stay inside of them, you’re all going to have to do as I say.”

“Hey, where do you think you’re going?” Maki stalks after Tsumugi as she goes to leave the room and completely blanks the four Exisals as they instantly turn their attention to her. “Do you really think I’m just going to let you start another killing game, Shirogane? Iruma is fixing the wall as we speak-”

“She’s probably still groggy,” Tsumugi responds. “And I doubt she even knows what’s going on right now. It’s going to be *hours* before she even thinks about fixing anything, you do realise that, right?”

It’s so *weird* hearing them both talk to each other about things Kaito doesn’t understand. He can feel his face shift into a frown as Maki and Tsumugi continue to stare at each other, Tsumugi’s face twisted into a carefree sneer whilst Maki’s entire expression is horrifyingly dark. He wants to step in and intervene, to tell Tsumugi to shut up and promise that she’s just fucking around. Hell, maybe he’s desperate but if she spins around and starts laughing about how all of this is just one big joke then maybe he’ll laugh nervously along too. He feels like he’s in a scene that only happens in fiction. Make belief.

He wants to believe that this is just one fucked up nightmare and that he’s going to wake up any second. However, the pain that is festering in his chest unfortunately reminds him that he’s actually conscious and that he’s not going to be opening his eyes any time soon far away from here.

Still, he can’t just stand around and let Maki battle Tsumugi all on her own! What sort of man would he be if he lets Maki do all of the heavy work? If he takes a backseat now then Tsumugi is just going to think that he’s a coward and like *hell* does he want her to think that he’s just some scaredy-cat who isn’t capable of keeping everyone safe. He’s the Luminary of the Stars! He’s

Kaito Momota! He's the dazzling hero everyone needs, with his slicked back hair and his starry cloak, *um*, well, okay his starry *jacket* (which he still needs to find.)

The moment Tsumugi made the threat of a killing game actually real, Kaito promised himself that he wouldn't ever give her the satisfaction of bloodying his hands. He's not going to hurt anyone here. Hell, he's not even going to swat a fly! And that's *not* because he's scared Gonta might actually throw him across the school if he does (that's only a small reason why he's not going to karate chop a fly mid-air) but because he wants to prove a big fucking point to Tsumugi that he's not going to let her get her own way!

Human life is so fucking precious. It's so, *so* precious. What sort of sick monster wants to turn murder into a game for their own satisfaction? It pisses him off!

"The wall is going to be fixed and we're all leaving as soon as it is," Maki responds firmly, as if saying it out loud will make her words come true.

"Whatever you say, Harukawa." Tsumugi smiles gently at her and Kaito suspects that she is on purpose.

The four Exisals guard her as she leaves. Kaito can tell Maki wants to follow her but hesitates. Maybe Maki has finally become a little more clear minded and has realised that trying to fight four heavily armed machines is probably a horrible idea. No, not probably, *is* a horrible idea. Kaito supposes if push comes to shove and if Tsumugi is serious about keeping her promise of exterminating everyone once her time limit is up then maybe he would personally try to fight an Exisal but...

No, he should stop thinking so *negatively*. The group doesn't need to be dragged down by such anxiety fuelled thoughts. What everyone needs right now is a beacon of hope, someone who is willing to guide everyone through this mess. Someone who can keep morale up because let's face it, things are real fucking depressing right now.

Okay so sure, everyone is basically in a nightmare right now but the thing about nightmares is that they always end, right? If Maki is right about someone being able to fix the wall then that just means everyone needs to ride this nightmare out until it can be ended. Like *yeah*, Tsumugi's so called Ultimate Motive is going to be a *huge* pain in the ass to deal with but as long as Kaito's around, the stupidly named motive can go and fuck itself.

Kaito looks around at everyone. Gonta currently looks lost, almost traumatised as he puts a hand on Angie's shoulder. The artist is smiling but Kaito can tell that it's fake since her eyes betray how worried she actually is. Korekiyo is hard to read but Kaito likes to think he's probably not best pleased. Tenko is chewing on the skin around her thumb, looking like she wants to punch something hard. Kiibo is staring into space with static filled eyes and Kaito hopes that the robot is just thinking and not malfunctioning under stress. Kirumi's knuckles strain against her black gloves tightly whilst Kokichi drums his fingers against the table slowly. Kaito can tell by the crease between his brows that Kokichi is thinking hard about something.

Maki is doing an excellent job trying to keep the group safe but, well, how does Kaito put this nicely? It's clear that she's lacking the social skills to keep the group happy. He thinks that maybe since she's an assassin, she hasn't been brought up with the best social etiquette. Which is *fine*! Just because she isn't all that chatty doesn't mean she's not a good person! Sometimes actions speak louder than words and the fact Maki wants to protect the group with her own two hands is an excellent indicator that Maki is someone he can trust!

She can focus on *physically* keeping the group safe whilst he focuses on keeping the group

emotionally safe! He might not know everyone but he knows that bottling up emotions is a no go in a situation like this. He needs to get everyone talking, to make everyone form bonds so that they can all trust each other. The worst thing that can happen right now is if everyone goes their separate ways.

See, if everyone doesn't bond then no one will become friends with each other. And, well, you're less likely to be killed by a friend. An enemy on the other hand? Kaito just hopes that Maki's promise of an exit appearing soon will put people off the temptation of killing. He doubts anyone here is twisted enough to even consider ending another person's life in the first place but still...

No, no, no, c'mon, don't let your mind wander so easily man! Everything is going to be fine! If you believe that everything is going to be fine then that means everything is going to be fine! Look around you, everyone is terrified right now! Now's your time to shine, Luminary of the Stars!

"Listen up, everyone!" Kaito calls out as he knocks his fists together, grinning when everyone turns to look at him with varying looks of confusion. "I know things don't look so good right now but--"

"Did anyone else suddenly feel really scared when Exisals enter room?" Gonta suddenly asks, causing Kaito's grin to twitch. "Gonta no understand why but when he saw Exisals he suddenly felt really scared. Chest started to hurt real bad."

"Angie sensed some horrendous vibes coming from the Exisals," Angie tells him. "So she thinks she'll just stay as far away from them as possible because she totally doesn't want to deal with them."

"Well as long as you don't do something to upset the Monokubs or Shirogane then I'm sure you won't have to go anywhere near them," Korekiyo reassures her, or maybe he's just stating a fact. He looks like he's thriving a little too much as his eyes flutter shut. "What an interesting situation we've all found ourselves in."

"*Ahem.*" Kaito clears his throat. Okay, time for take two! "Like seriously, yeah, I know things are totally shit at the moment but as long as we--"

"I simply can't come up with any logical reason as to why someone would want people to kill each other," Kiibo says as he suddenly springs back to life, his eyes no longer filled with static. Kaito feels his jaw lock. "It's illogical. I thought humans were supposed to care for each other? Even though I'm a robot I know for a fact that I would never purposefully hurt anyone."

"Humans are complicated, Kiiboy," Kokichi tells him as he slaps a hand down onto the robot's shoulder. "But since you're a robot I don't think you'll ever understand."

"A-Are you insulting me?" Kiibo starts to wither under Kokichi's teasing grin.

"Guys!" Kaito huffs and knocks his fists together for good measure. He maybe only has the attention of a couple people. Kirumi is the only one who is visibly waiting vigilantly but he also knows Maki and Tenko are also listening to him too, even though Tenko is currently frowning at a wall.

"Angie thinks she might just go find somewhere safe to wait," Angie says as she eyes the dining room doors. "Like, she totally doesn't feel safe in here at all and Angie really doesn't want to die so..."

"You can't leave!" Kaito shouts a little too loudly, causing Angie to jump. She looks at him

expectantly.

“Um, *why?*”

“Because we need to stick together!” Kaito feels like he’s talking to a brick wall. “If we all start doing our own thing then-”

“So are you just going to keep us hostage in here, spaceman?” Kokichi asks and Kaito hopes he’s fucking joking because there’s *no way* he’d do something so *shitty!*

Maki’s patience snaps and she lodges her butter knife into the table with one quick flick of her wrist. The entire room goes silent instantly. “Will you all just *shut up* and listen to Momota?” She pauses. “I’m getting sick of him having to repeat himself.”

“Um...” Kaito clears his throat. Well, *that’s* certainly one way to get everyone’s attention. Now that everyone’s eyes are on him, he starts his speech again. “Look, I know we all don’t really know each other well right now and the situation we’re in is scary as fuck but from the looks of things we might be stuck here for a while and until the exit is ready to use or Harukawa finds a way to stop the Exisals, we’re all going to have to work together so Shirogane doesn’t get what she wants!”

“Tch, you’re acting like we’re all suddenly going to turn on each other just because some stranger we don’t even know wants us to,” Kokichi responds, rolling his eyes. “Wow, do you really think *that* lowly of us all?”

“What? *No!*” Kaito splutters indignantly. “I’m just saying-”

What the hell is this guy’s problem?! Of course I don’t think lowly of anyone in this room! I want to believe that I can trust everyone! I have zero intention of hurting anyone here and I’m just making sure everyone feels the same way as me! Tch, isn’t Kokichi supposed to be some sort of leader anyway? Is he trying to cause problems on purpose?

“I believe Momota is simply trying to encourage us,” Kirumi says. “However, he does make an excellent point. Until an exit becomes available we are going to have to trust each other and I understand that might be hard for some of us considering the circumstances. After all, since it’s looking more and more likely that we *have* been here several times before, the implication that... some of us have killed each other once before is going to make us all feel justifiably uncomfortable.”

“Wow, I didn’t actually think about that at all but now that you mention it I might just leave so I don’t get, like, stabbed or something equally as nasty,” Kokichi says and despite his morbid words, he has a cheeky smile on his face. Kaito wonders if he’s just incredibly carefree or likes to go out of his way to be fucking annoying.

Kaito lets out an exasperated huff. “What did I just say?!”

“Nishishi, don’t look so constipated, Momota! I was just kidding,” Kokichi reassures him and rests his hands behind his head. “I’d rather take my chances with everyone here rather than accidentally bump into Shirogane! She has totally failed my vibe check, you know?”

The astronaut groans as he starts to massage his forehead. He feels a migraine starting to make itself known. “Speaking of Shirogane, I think it’s fair to say we should allow Harukawa to restrain her.”

“Won’t that just upset the Monokubs?” Tenko points out. “Tenko isn’t sure if her neo-aikido works against machines or not.”

“Well isn’t now the perfect opportunity to do some trial and error then?” Korekiyo says, not even flinching as Tenko shoots him an icy glare.

“And what if Tenko gets seriously hurt? Or worse, dies?”

Korekiyo unhelpfully offers her a simple shrug. “I was merely making a suggestion, Chabashira. There’s no need to get so defensive.”

“Tenko wouldn’t have to be so defensive if you didn’t say such creepy things!” Tenko retorts before narrowing her eyes. “In fact, just *looking* at you makes Tenko’s skin crawl. Tenko loathes the idea of having to spend time with someone like you.”

“A-Aren’t you being a little harsh?” Kiiibo stammers, looking offended on Korekiyo’s behalf. “He was just making a point.”

“Yeah, well...” Tenko sniffs and looks at Korekiyo as if he’s dirt on the bottom of her shoe. “Tenko’s gut is telling her to stay the heck away from him and Tenko always listens to her gut!”

Maki sighs quietly to herself and Kaito nudges her. “Hey, what’s wrong?”

“I think I know why Chabashira is so uncomfortable around Shinguji,” Maki tells him discreetly, lowering her voice as Tenko sneers uncomfortably at the anthropologist. “Promise you won’t make a scene if I say why?”

Kaito raises an eyebrow at her cryptic words but nods nonetheless. “Okay, yeah, sure.”

“Shinguji killed her along with Tojo during the last game,” Maki whispers, looking a little too calm as she drops such a major bombshell. Kaito splutters on his next breath and Maki rolls her eyes as she slaps his back. “Momota, you *just* said you weren’t going to make a scene.”

“I’m not!” Kaito insists, completely oblivious that both Kirumi and Kokichi are staring at him as if he’s just done something incredibly stupid. He waves at them both dismissively when he finally notices. “Don’t worry guys, just, *ah*, breathed in a little funny.”

Even Maki looks unimpressed at his flimsy excuse. She huffs and turns away from him, crossing her arms.

Of course I’m going to have a bit of a dramatic reaction to her telling me that Korekiyo killed two people in the last game! I mean, yeah, both Tenko and Kirumi are clearly not dead right now but that doesn’t mean it’s fucking weird to hear Maki reveal such a thing! Is this what she was on about when she mentioned us experiencing moments of deja vu? I mean, since all of us are gathered in one room, shouldn’t all of us be sniping at each other right now? It makes you wonder what Korekiyo did to Tenko to make her loathe him so much even though she’s not supposed to know him all that well.

“Is everything okay, Momota?” Kirumi asks.

He pops one of his thumbs up with what he hopes is a reassuring smile. “Yeah! Seriously, I just breathed in a little funny, that’s all!”

Kokichi hums. “Yeah, sure, whatever you say, Momota-chan. By the way...” He raises an eyebrow. “You clearly want to be the leader of this little group, right? Heads up, most leaders don’t get so easily distracted. Maybe Momota should be discussing how he plans to restrain Shirogane instead of choking on air.”

Kaito feels his cheeks burn with embarrassment as Kokichi starts to whistle, checking his fingernails as Kaito glares at him with a childish pout. “W-Well the conversation changed topic so-”

“I’ll be the one sorting Shirogane out,” Maki says firmly. “So he doesn’t have to worry about her.”

There’s something about the sudden look of hatred in Maki’s eyes that doesn’t sit right with Kaito. He uncomfortably coughs into his hand as Maki defends Kaito almost instinctively, as if he’s someone she wants to protect. Sure, it’s nice having someone who wants to look out for you but at the same time the energy coming from Maki isn’t exactly...positive. It’s almost kind of scary.

Even Kokichi wavers under her glare before shrugging and scooting his chair away. Kaito might not like Kokichi’s attitude but he’s not going to deck him for being a sarcastic fucker. As far as Kaito’s concerned, almost everyone in the room is being equally as uncooperative. He gets it, some people are scared. Some people are confused. Some people are going to pretend everything is okay.

Kaito plans to guide every single person in this room out of this hell himself. He knows himself, he knows his limits. Not to be big headed but he practically specialises in encouraging people. He’s like...a mixture of a leader *and* a cheerleader! Only, Kaito would never wear a skirt and shake pompoms. No, he encourages people with passionate words. Oh, and *exercise*!

If all else fails, sitting back and looking up at the stars always does wonders for the soul. Looking up at a sky so vast with countless stars...wow, space is so beautiful. Kaito always feels his worries wash away when he knows he has the universe looking out for him. He can’t wait for the day when he can explore space. He’s *totally* going to do a backflip on the moon when he gets the chance.

He senses there may be a couple of obstacles he has to face if he wants to unite the group. There’s, of course, the blatantly obvious issue of people subconsciously hating each other. Which is like, *understandable*. He’d like it if everyone liked each other but now that he thinks about it, as long as he can get everyone to at least *tolerate* each other then he’ll see that as a win.

“Excuse me but I must ask,” Korekiyo says as he fiddles with a strand of his silky hair. “Harukawa, what exactly do you expect us all to do whilst we wait for this so-called exit to appear? Shirogane sounded serious when she told us about her motive.”

“Shirogane just kept listing lots of things she gonna do to us,” Gonta says with a shudder. “Even Gonta couldn’t keep up! Gonta do remember her saying that we not allowed to eat until someone dies and um...” Gonta’s stomach growls and the gentle giant lets out a loud sigh.

“Not all of us here are as resilient as you, Harukawa,” Kirumi points out. “I do remember finding some of Shirogane’s motives to be rather concerning too. The fact she plans to starve us is rather alarming and I’m also worried about the disease she mentioned too. Does she truly have the means to infect us with an unknown illness?”

“We’re in a simulation, correct?” Kiibo hums. “That means anything is possible.”

“Yep, yep!” Kokichi nods in agreement. “Everyone should just throw all logic out of the metaphorical window right now because it clearly doesn’t exist here! Once you do that, it’s *so* much easier to understand what’s going on!”

Maki sighs. “Why are you all looking at me for answers? All that’s left to do now is to wait for the exit to be fixed.”

“Aren’t you the slightest bit worried about Shirogane and the Monokubs?” Tenko asks. “She did say she was giving us a three day time limit, which Tenko supposes is actually rather generous coming from Shirogane but still! What if your friend isn’t able to fix the wall in time and the Exisals come after us?!”

“I’d hardly call Iruma my friend,” Maki grumbles before sighing loudly. “And I doubt the Monokubs are even going to be around by the time the exit is secured. I’m going to sort them out the first chance I get.”

“Sort them out?” Kiibo tilts his head to the side. “What do you mean by that?”

Maki rolls her eyes. “I’m going to destroy them *and* the Exisals.”

“Alone?!” Gonta’s eyes go wide as his entire body startles. “Gonta no let you fight Exisals alone! Gonta big and strong! If Harukawa need help fighting Exisals then Gonta will fight alongside her!”

“That’s...” Maki chews her lip. “That’s kind of you but I’d rather fight them myself since the more people that get involved, the more obstacles I’ll have to deal with.”

“O-Oh...” Gonta wavers hesitantly. “But-”

“I’m used to running on empty,” Maki tells him. “I can function just fine even after not eating for several days. I doubt you’d be able to keep up with me. In fact, I don’t think anyone here could. I know I told you all that we’re currently in a simulation but I also did say our bodies have the same needs as if they were our actual human bodies. The lack of food is going to hit you all harder than you all expect.”

“Well...what about me then?” Kiibo asks. “I don’t need food. I might not know how to fight all that well but if I can do anything to help everyone out then I don’t mind lending you my support, Harukawa.”

“Woah, do you have any super cool hidden robot functions?” Kokichi gasps before putting his hands to his cheeks, his eyes sparkling with childlike glee. “Can your hand turn into a rocket launcher?!”

“What? No! Of course it can’t!” Kiibo bristles. “I was designed to be as human-like as possible! *You* don’t have a rocket launcher for a hand so why would I?!”

“Aw man...” Kokichi doesn’t even bother to hide his disappointment and quickly finds playing with a piece of table cloth more interesting than talking to Kiibo. “What’s the point in being a robot if you don’t even upgrade yourself? You’re such a let down, Kiiboy.”

“*Hrrk...*” Kiibo looks more than offended. “I may not feel emotions but I’m finding your comments to be very hurtful. Keep this up and I’ll-”

“Take you to court, yeah, yeah, I’ve heard it all before,” Kokichi sighs before sitting up straight, sharing Kiibo’s look of confusion as they both stare at each other.

“Um, I’ve not threatened to take you to court before,” Kiibo says. “Or...have I?”

Kokichi very unhelpfully shrugs. “You seem like the type of robot to sue someone for no reason so...”

Maki clearly has no qualms about interrupting their conversation as she says, “Kiibo, I already said that the more people involved with taking out the Monokubs, the more obstacles I’ll have to deal

with.”

“Oh...” Kiibo looks a little put off. “Sorry, I was only trying to help.”

Maki is rather good at keeping her face stoic but Kaito can't help but notice that there's this tired look in her eyes. She seems drained, *exhausted*. Emotionally exhausted to be specific. Perhaps she's pushing everyone away because she doesn't want anyone to get hurt? Maybe since she's an assassin, she's not used to working in groups? Kaito doubts that she's going to do anything reckless since she's made it clear her memories mean the entire world to her but...shit, he hates that she's carrying around so much weight alone.

“I know,” Maki says before casting her eyes down onto the table, a distant look in her eyes as if she's seeing something no one else can. “I'm...going to see what weapons there are available then plan my next move. I'll make sure to give you all a heads up when I plan to fight the Exisals. Just...” She swallows and rubs her eyes with a drained sigh. “No one do anything stupid. No doubt that Shirogane is going to kickstart her motive soon. If she gives anyone a video, don't watch it. If she starts sharing secrets, ignore them. I'm sure you're all smart enough to figure out what you should and shouldn't do.”

The assassin leaves and no one is brave enough to call after her. It's starting to become more and more obvious by what she meant by she didn't plan things through properly before coming here. Sure, Maki couldn't have predicted that Tsumugi was going to throw such a stupid fucking motive at everyone, giving the assassin one more thing to worry about. However, it's horrible to watch Maki have to make things up as she goes along. It's obviously stressing her out and a tiny, selfish part of Kaito doesn't want her to crumble under the weight of everything. Having her around...it's nice. Reassuring.

“...she never told us what she wants us to do,” Korekiyo says when no one else speaks up.

Angie shrugs and she suddenly seems a lot more cheerful now that Maki is out of the room. “And? We all just need to keep ourselves safe. That's what Angie's God is telling her anyway.”

“I'm fairly confident that as long as we're here, none of us are safe,” Kiibo points out. “And unfortunately it seems that the rules are still in play. Whilst there's only a couple that we need to worry about...”

“The Monokubs seem more than excited to kill us at any opportunity,” Tenko says before shuddering. “In fact, Tenko is sort of worried that they might just get impatient and kill us anyway!”

“Stop, stop, stop!” Kaito shakes his head with a disappointed sigh. “C'mon guys, lighten up! You're all jumping to the worst case scenarios! I mean, yeah, things are absolutely shit right now but we're all still alive! *And* we have Harukawa on our side and she's, like, totally badass!”

“She looks at me as if I'm her personal punching bag,” Kokichi says with a pout. “Which is, like, really rude of her.”

“She's stressed,” Kaito finds himself quickly responding. “Really stressed! And can you blame her? She remembers a lot of messed of shit that we don't that's got her on edge right now. She's got enough to deal with at the moment without us constantly relying on her for everything! In fact, *I'll* figure out what we should all do so-”

“Oh, you must've misunderstood me,” Korekiyo says. “I wasn't looking for any instructions from her in particular. I simply don't think it's very reasonable of her to expect us to just wait around and

trust that everything will be fine. Whilst I am curious about how all of this will play out, I must admit I don't entirely respect Harukawa enough to believe that she has everything under control."

"Hah? And what the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"I like observing but I also like living too," Korekiyo tells him. "And I would like to leave sooner rather than later."

"Harukawa is trying her best, okay?!" Kaito retorts. "Dude, you've been nothing but harsh to her ever since waking up here."

"Yes, well, I don't like her and people don't tend to be nice to the people they don't like," Korekiyo says. "It's nothing personal. Harukawa certainly has no problem with treating people she doesn't like nicely either."

"But *why* don't you like her?"

"Because I have standards, Momota," Korekiyo says before standing up. "And Harukawa doesn't meet them."

"Hey, wait! Where are you going?!" Kaito almost trips over himself as Korekiyo starts to leave.

The anthropologist raises an eyebrow. "Oh? Do you not want me to go?"

"Of course fucking not, we need to talk about what we're all going to do next!" Kaito responds.

"We're all simply waiting for an exit to become available, correct?" Korekiyo says. "So that means there really isn't much to talk about and if I'm being completely honest, I think I'd rather have a look around and get to know my surroundings."

Korekiyo's rather blunt response leaves Kaito dumbfounded as the anthropologist makes his exit. He doesn't get how Korekiyo doesn't even hesitate to leave all by himself. Does he not get the severity of the situation? Does he just not care that there's five homicidal teddy bears lurking around the school with a terrifying girl leading them?

"Angie thinks she would also like to leave," Angie says to Kaito's surprise. He gapes at her as she stands up elegantly from her chair, rolling her yellow coat sleeves up as they fall over her hands. "Her God is telling her that talking is just a waste of time. Angie wouldn't even be here in the first place if we could solve all our problems through talking."

Before he can ask her what she even means, Angie leaves the room, dragging Gonta out with her by the sleeve of his jacket. He looks a little bashful as he waves goodbye to the group. There's no doubt that she's bringing him along for protection and Kaito wonders if something happened for Angie to put so much faith into the entomologist.

Kaito looks back at his slowly diminishing group and sarcastically asks, "does anyone else wanna leave?"

"I, um..." Kiiibo flinches under Kaito's flat glare. "Want to have a look around and familiarise myself with the layout of the school. I know Harukawa doesn't plan for us to stay here for long but even so, I would still like to know where everything is."

"What an excellent idea, Kiiboy!" Kokichi latches himself onto the robot's arm. "We should totally explore together too! After all, you're my best friend!"

"I highly doubt you're telling the truth," Kiibo says, smiling almost dejectedly as Kokichi proves him right by letting out a small giggle. "But I won't stop you from joining me if you really want to explore together."

"Aw, you're so kind, Kiiboy!" Kokichi coos. "Keep it up and I might even consider you to be my favourite robot!"

Kiibo sighs, shooting Kaito a somewhat apologetic look as he leaves the room, leaving Kaito with only Kirumi and Tenko. The astronaut can't help but feel disappointed that he has such a small group of people left to work with. His heart sinks even further as Tenko ruefully stands up, pressing two fingers together as her eyes flicker towards the door.

"Tenko, um, gets that Momota is trying to help but she also wants to check on Angie since Tenko thinks she's nervous about something," Tenko says. "So..."

Well this isn't what he expected. Tenko leaves the room awkwardly whilst Kaito slumps into a chair with a loud sigh, running a hand through his gelled hair. Hmm. Was it actually naïve of him to expect everyone to sit and talk like adults?

We're all in the same shitty situation as each other so why the hell is everyone so quick to do their own thing? I mean, yeah, Kiibo wants to explore and Tenko wants to check up on Angie but...shit, this group is severely lacking any sort of team spirit! How the hell are we supposed to support each other when no one is willing to stay in the same room as each other?! If astronaut training has taught me one thing it's that communication is extremely important! How are we all supposed to overcome the challenge of surviving this hellhole if we can't rely on each other? The fact that the group is already falling apart so early on...is a bit of a concern. Looks like I need to step in and intervene!

"Momota, are you okay?"

"Oh! Tojo!" Kaito rubs the back of his head bashfully as Kirumi looks at him with a deep look of concern. "Sorry, I must've spaced out! Yeah, I'm fine!"

"You looked like you were deep in thought," Kirumi says before looking around the room quietly. "I must admit I didn't expect everyone to leave so quickly. Whilst I understand why some people don't want to just sit and talk, at the very least it would've been ideal to have some sort of course of action figured out."

Kaito's eyes light up as he leans forward. "I know, *right?! I mean, yeah*, we've just had a shit ton of information dumped on us at once and I get that everyone is processing everything but it kind of pisses me off that everyone just wants to do their own thing. We should be working *together* to overcome Shirogane!"

"Indeed. If Shirogane sees that we've all united as a group then she'll find it harder to get her own way," Kirumi says. She tucks a loose strand of hair behind her ear. "Every group needs a leader and I couldn't help but notice that you seem to want to take that role, Momota. Am I correct?"

"Huh? Hell yeah you are!" Kaito thumps his chest proudly. "The moment Shirogane confirmed that we're basically in hell I just *knew* I wanted to keep everyone safe!"

It's a hero's job to keep everyone safe, after all!

"I see..." Kirumi smiles almost sympathetically at him. "You do realise that making yourself stand out might cause you a lot of problems in the long run? Shirogane might start targeting you more

than anyone else. Once a group loses their leader, that's when things become dangerous."

Kaito lets out a startled laugh. "You don't have to worry about me! There's no way I'm letting Shirogane get to me!"

"She might hurt you herself however," Kirumi says. "She did strongly imply that she'd happily start her killing game herself if no one else does."

Kaito snorts. "I doubt someone like Shirogane can hurt me!" He flexes an arm proudly. "Years of astronaut training means I'm more than capable of defending myself! *Against Shirogane*." He pauses. "I'm not sure I could fight an Exisal though."

Kirumi stifles a laugh. "I wasn't expecting you to fight the Exisals, Momota."

"I bet Harukawa could take them all out," Kaito says, his grin softening into a gentle smile. "She's really cool, isn't she?"

"Harukawa is...interesting," Kirumi responds. "I know you like her but I must admit I'm not sure what my opinion of her is just yet."

Kaito sighs. "Look, I know her admitting that she could've helped us out a lot sooner makes her look really bad but what matters is that she's here *now*, right? I mean, she seems rough around the edges but my gut is telling me that we can trust her! I just wish everyone else would ease up on her a little."

"People tend to lash out when they're scared," Kirumi tells him. "And people especially tend to lash out at people who hold all the answers. The moment someone hears something they don't want to hear, they're going to blame whoever they heard the information from. That's why I must ask if you're sure about wanting to lead this group. If someone goes wrong then everyone is going to inevitably blame you. I'm not trying to scare you but..."

"Don't worry, I have pretty thick skin!" Kaito reassures her with a grin. "It'll take a lot more than a couple of insults to hurt me!"

"It's your patience I'm more worried about," Kirumi says, causing Kaito's grin to dim. "I'm not trying to offend you but I've noticed you're rather hot-headed. Every time someone has disagreed with you or has said something you don't like, well, you haven't exactly responded positively."

"T-That's just because I'm passionate!" Kaito insists. He swallows as Kirumi continues to look at him with an unreadable expression. "I don't purposefully try to start fights, you know? I just..."

Kirumi doesn't think I'm just some aggressive thug, does she?

"I know, Momota. I can tell that you just have the group's best interest at heart," Kirumi says. "And I'm not trying to say I don't think you won't be a good leader. I think right now it's important everyone has someone they can rely on. I just want to make sure you're comfortable with taking that role."

"Please! I was *born* to lead people!" Kaito proudly announces.

Kirumi pauses before smiling. "If that's the case then I would like to offer you my services. Every leader needs an advisor, someone they can turn to for support. If you would like, I'll happily help you out whilst we're here."

Kaito suddenly slaps his hands together loudly, his eyes sparkling with excitement as he says,

“yes! You can *totally* be my sidekick, Tojo!”

“Ah, I said I’d be your *advisor*—”

“Kaito Momota, Luminary of the Stars and his sidekick Kirumi Tojo!” Kaito drapes his arm around Kirumi’s shoulder as he waves his hand slowly above them both, as if pointing out something magical. “We’re gonna be unstoppable!”

“...I do suppose being a sidekick is sort of the same as being an advisor,” Kirumi mumbles to herself as Kaito continues to grin excitedly.

“So, sidekick!” Kaito knocks his fists together. “What’s our first plan of action going to be?”

—

They talk.

Kirumi carefully coaxes him into being more patient and a little less reckless. A lot of Kaito’s plans end with him punching an Exisal, which might be because the stupid machines are always on his mind. He hopes Maki doesn’t get hurt by any of them.

Kaito isn’t the sort of person to plan meticulously. He’s more of an action first, talk later sort of guy. Sure, usually that gets him into trouble but every time he trails off into a tangent about sending the Monokubs into the stratosphere or rugby tackling Tsumugi into the dirt, Kirumi reminds him that actions have consequences.

“If you want to keep everyone safe, you’re going to have to not be so impulsive.”

He thought he was good at taking constructive criticism but when Kirumi had said that to him, there was this argumentative voice in the back of his head that screamed that yeah, he *knows* that but sometimes you have to take risks! He took a risk when forging (extremely) illegal documents so he could get into astronaut training a little earlier than usual.

Yeah, he got into *so* much trouble for it. However, the payoff was worth it! The higher ups had liked his positive attitude and his desire to explore the great unknown. So they let him start astronaut training a little early and accidentally inflated his ego in the process. Not that he has a humongous ego! He’s humble. (He’s also a little bit biased since that’s his opinion but he’s never been wrong in his entire life so, yeah. He’s humble. Totally!)

Kirumi encourages him to take a break and explore the school. Even though the tablets all apparently have maps on them, sometimes it’s just better to look around in person. You know, to help with muscle memory and all that.

He ends up outside and his feet carry him all the way to the huge crack in the wall. He didn’t exactly plan to go there but at the same time it’s almost as if he can’t control himself. He just wants to see the huge grey slab of nothingness again, despite feeling hollow when he even *thinks* about it.

Kaito is mildly surprised to see that someone has already beaten him to the wall once again. Last time it had been Maki who had been staring at the slab with a blank expression. Instead, it’s now Kokichi who is peering up at the slab, one of his hands pressed against it gently.

He clears his throat to make himself known before asking, “hey, I thought you were with Kiibo?”

“He was too slow so I ended up ditching him,” Kokichi tells him, turning to face him with an inscrutable expression. He presses his hand a little more firmly against the grey abyss. “You know,

this is a lot colder than I thought it was going to be.”

“The grey slab?” Kaito hums before nodding slightly. “Yeah, I thought that too when I first touched it. It’s *weird*, right?”

“It’s...” Kokichi turns away from him so he can go back to staring at the grey slab. “Yeah, it’s weird.”

Hmm, it kinda felt like he wanted to say something else. I'd push him but he has this really...sad look in his eyes. Is he aware that he looks so upset? All I've seen him wear so far are smiles so it's really bizarre seeing him so...subdued.

Kaito reaches his own hand out and places it next to Kokichi’s. He’s momentarily amused as he realises how much bigger his own hand is and he knows Kokichi is a little put off by the difference since he starts to pout and purposefully sidesteps his fingers a little further away.

“So what brings you here, spaceman? Going to try and recruit me to become a member of the Maki Harukawa fan club? I can’t lie, I think she’d personally kick me out of it herself,” Kokichi rambles as he traces along the cold grey with one of his fingers.

“She’s not that bad,” Kaito sighs. “She’s just dealing with a lot.”

“Yeah, that’s cool and all but that doesn’t mean she has to look at me like she wants to shove a knife down my throat every time I say something,” Kokichi responds. “She’s such a meanie.”

“I’m sure she doesn’t actually want to kill you-”

“Hmm, are you sure about that?” Kokichi says. “Just because she likes you for whatever reason doesn’t mean she likes the rest of us. If she actually cared about us then she would’ve tried to get us all out of here a lot sooner.”

Kaito groans and rests his head against the grey slab. “She already said she was *scared*! She’s here now and that’s all that matters.”

“To you maybe,” Kokichi responds. “But, you know, I can't imagine that everyone is going to feel the same as you. Harukawa basically did admit that she and everyone else outside of the game have had plenty of chances to help us but never did.”

“So you *do* believe her about the whole...” Kaito gestures around with his hands. “Simulation thing? I mean, *yeah*, it is sort of weird to think that we’re all just hooked up to one big machine but it’s also sort of a relief too, I guess? It sucks that we don't remember everything but I’d rather lose a couple of memories than actually die.”

“Doesn’t it bother you that...” Kokichi pauses before smiling brightly. “Nah, forget it.”

“No, no, if you’ve got something to say then say it,” Kaito tells him.

“But it’s not important!” Kokichi insists. “Besides, why would I want to spill my deepest and darkest secrets to a complete stranger!”

Kaito doesn’t mean to flinch but Kokichi’s words hit as if he actually punched him. He quickly covers up his little slip up with a sheepish laugh and says, “haha, whoops, thought I was going to sneeze but it was just a false alarm!”

“Hmm...” Kokichi looks at him like he doesn’t believe him. “Okay, sure. Whatever you say,

spaceman.”

...seems like we both have something to lie about. I wonder what Kokichi was about to say. He might've changed the subject quickly but he let it slip that something is bothering him. Is it something to do with the wall, perhaps? Is that why he's here?

“I was serious about what I said before,” Kaito says. “If you have something you want to say then you should just say it. Otherwise you might regret not saying something sooner.”

Kokichi rolls his eyes playfully. “Geez, way to be dramatic! Are you the type of person who likes to overthink everything? Hmm, but that can't be right because Momota seems like he's pretty impulsive so...”

“And you seem like the type of person who likes to purposely annoy people for no reason,” Kaito says. He knows his patience is starting to fray. He's always had a short temper. However, there's something at the back of his mind telling him to chill the fuck out because Kokichi is right, they are strangers. He doesn't actually know who Kokichi Ouma is and-

If he loses his shit with him too soon then it's going to end up with the two of them in a cold room that's covered in blood. It's going to be the two of them and then it's just going to be Kaito because one second Kokichi is going to be there and the next he's-

“Earth to Momo-chan! Yoo hoo!” Kaito blinks and quickly realises that there's a hand waving in front of his face. He swats it away, barely noticing as Kokichi pouts and cradles his hand to his chest. “Well that was uncalled for!”

“Sorry? Did you say something?” Kaito asks and plasters his face with the biggest grin he can muster. What the hell was *that* all about? The blurry image that popped into his mind is too foggy for him to recall with certainty but the fear he felt when it appeared is undeniable. Which is super weird because Kaito doesn't get scared easily! (Disclaimer: as long as there's no ghosts around.) “Sorry, I think I must've zoned out for just a second.”

“Zoned out? You practically teleported into a different dimension!” Kokichi says. “Which was totally rude of you! Am I becoming too boring for you, Momota? You're going to break my fragile heart if you keep this up!”

Kokichi flutters his eyelashes obnoxiously and Kaito rolls his eyes, lightly shoving the smaller male's shoulder half-heartedly. “Don't say weird shit like that. Look, my bad, I...just zoned out, that's all.”

“Teleported,” Kokichi corrects him. He raises an eyebrow. “Geez, you look like you've just seen a ghost-”

“G-Ghosts aren't real!” Kaito quickly tells him before mentally scolding himself as the corners of Kokichi's lip twitch into a teasing smile. “I mean, only little kids believe in them.”

“Is it that Momo-chan is scared of ghosts?” Kokichi ponders out loud on purpose. He taps his chin. “That's a shame because I totally saw a couple earlier whilst walking around the school. They were all saying the same thing too!” He flops his hands out in front of himself, poking his tongue out. “Momotaaa...Momotaaa...we've been looking everywhere for you because we have some important news, *Momotaaaaa!* The moon landing was faked, Momotaaa-”

“Quit it!” Kaito slaps his hand over his mouth and he feels Kokichi snort under him. “Dude, you're not fucking funny.”

Kokichi knocks his hand away, giggling quietly to himself. “Au contraire, Momo-chan. I am actually a comedic genius. I am the *peak* of comedy.”

“That’s a fucking lie.” Kaito rolls his eyes.

“Maybe it is, maybe it isn’t,” Kokichi responds.

“Dude, you are so weird,” Kaito says. “Seriously, I don’t think I’ve ever met someone as confusing as you before. I swear you’re going to give me fucking whiplash one day.”

“Aw thanks, I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“I *definitely* wasn’t complimenting you.”

“Ah but I already took your words as a compliment so tough luck,” Kokichi says. “You have to be more clear from the start, Momota! Maybe *you’re* going to give *me* whiplash from your idiocy!”

Kaito grumbles to himself bitterly as Kokichi does his weird little laugh out loud. “Well I bet *my* whiplash will hurt *more* and be *more* severe so *hah!* Suck it!” Man, Kaito sure does love being such a mature person.

“Is that so?” Kokichi responds, sounding rather amused.

Kaito falters before it finally clicks that he’s bickering over who is capable of getting the worst whiplash of all things. He sighs and massages his forehead. He really needs to stop getting so distracted so easily! It’s just, the moment Kokichi opens his mouth and says something it’s like Kaito gets this primal urge to just fucking bicker with him for seemingly no reason at all. Playful bicker, of course. Kokichi unfortunately seems to be the type of person who is frustratingly funny.

Thankfully Kokichi doesn’t say anything else and looks back up at the grey slab with a deliberately neutral expression. It’s a little frustrating that Kokichi willingly chooses to wear mask after mask. It would be nice to know what he’s thinking. Well, hopefully once things settle down, Kokichi might ease up a little.

On one hand I just want to shake him until he gives me a straight answer but on the other I just... fuck, what the hell did I see before? Did I even see anything? It was more like this...horrible feeling that made my stomach hurt. Is this what Maki meant by us having moments of deja vu? But I don’t think that would count as a moment deja vu, it was just a...a memory, right? But if what I saw was a memory then...

“I wonder who the smart bastard is who figured out the wall needed to be broken,” Kokichi ponders. He presses a finger against the glass, creating a rather annoying squeaking sound as he drags it down. He pauses before craning his neck up to look at the very top of the crack. “Kudos to them for figuring that one out.”

“Yeah, kudos.” Kaito copies Kokichi, making his neck ache as he also peers up the large crack. “Man, I’m glad I’m not the unfortunate soul who had to make this hole. Do you see how big it is?”

Kokichi nods, tracing his fingers along the edge of the crack. Kaito raises an eyebrow at the lack of response before noticing the slightly glazed look in the smaller male’s eyes. Oh, is this what Kokichi had meant when he said Kaito had teleported? Kokichi looks like he’s anywhere but here, despite standing right next to Kaito and absentmindedly tracing the cracked edge of the hole with his finger.

Which, now Kaito that thinks about it, is a stupid fucking thing to do because Kokichi is running

his finger along cracked glass and that is literally an accident waiting to happen. He snatches his hand up and by default, also snatches Kokichi's attention. The smaller male blinks slowly before staring down at the hand Kaito is using to hold his own.

See, what Kaito had planned to do was drop his hand right away but something that's akin to a chain reaction happens. When he grabs Kokichi's hand, the first thing that pops into his head is *oh, his hand is actually really clammy.*

Then, he hears something. He hears voices that sound like they're underwater, muffled and distant and...joking around.

"Your hand...is really sweaty."

"So is yours."

And he doesn't know why but his chest starts to really hurt. He stands there, clutching Kokichi's hand like a lifeline even though they're both *strangers* and they don't know each other. Maybe they did *once* but now they don't. They don't remember each other and for some reason that suddenly really bothers him.

"Hey Momota?" The phantom voice asks him. *"...next time we wake up here...I'd really..."*

"Momota? You wanna let go of my hand? You're cutting off my blood circulation, you know?"

"I'd really like it if you..."

"Momota!"

"What?!"

Kaito jerks as he realises Kokichi has been clicking his fingers right in front of his face with his free hand. Kokichi pulls a face and gestures towards Kaito's hand that is pretty much strangling Kokichi's own. He lets go instantly, as if Kokichi's hand had suddenly turned white hot.

"Geez, what was that, spaceman?" Kokichi grumbles. "Are you trying to re-enact Harukawa strangling Shirogane with my hand?"

"N-No, I just thought..." Kaito trails off as he looks back at the hole in the wall. "Sorry, I thought I heard something."

"Well *I* didn't hear anything," Kokichi says, clearly annoyed that Kaito had taken his hand prisoner momentarily. "Sheesh, it's a miracle my hand is still attached. Never mind Shirogane starving us of food, you were about to starve my hand of air."

"I already said I'm sorry," Kaito mumbles. "It's just, your hand...felt really warm and..."

It made me feel really sad.

"Yeah, well, I have naturally warm hands," Kokichi says with a sniff, wiping his hands on his trousers. "You're the weirdo who grabbed me for no reason."

"You were going to cut yourself!" Kaito retorts, suddenly remembering the entire reason why he grabbed Kokichi in the first place. *"You were the one who was running your hand along the glass! You could've really hurt yourself!"*

"Hmm? Are you telling lies, Momota? I don't remember doing that," Kokichi says and there's this

frustratingly genuine look in his eyes despite Kaito literally witnessing Kokichi run his finger along the glass himself.

“You were!” Kaito insists. “And I grabbed your hand to stop you and then realised how freakishly warm your hand is. Like...” He grabs Kokichi’s hand as if to prove a point, ignoring Kokichi’s squawk of protest. Kaito wouldn’t say his hands are particularly cold but the moment they make contact with Kokichi’s hand, they soak up the heat coming from it instantly. In fact, Kaito can’t help but feel that Kokichi’s hand is *abnormally* warm. “Dude, you’re actually *really* hot.”

“Oh?” Kokichi looks surprisingly caught off guard for a moment before saying, “aw, thanks Momo-chan!”

“Shut the hell up, you *know* what I meant,” Kaito grumbles, clicking his tongue as Kokichi yanks his hand away. “Your hand is really sweaty.”

“It’s like you just said, I’m super hot, Momo-chan.”

Kaito almost pulls his hair out in frustration. “Ouma, you know I-”

“*Relaaax*, I’m only teasing you,” Kokichi says. He shrugs. “I don’t know what to say, I mean, it is a little hotter than I expected it to be out here but...”

“...just look after yourself, okay?” Kaito ends up saying. “I know Shirogane said something about spreading a disease...let’s just hope this is something totally different.”

Talking about potential diseases and illnesses makes him feel like there are butterflies uneasily flapping their wings inside of his stomach. Kaito grimaces as Kokichi blinks before smiling playfully.

“I’m sure I’ll be fine, Momo-chan.”

—

The exit doesn’t appear even as the sky is taken over by stars. It disappoints Kaito somewhat that the sky is fake, a mere projection to con everyone into believing that it’s dark out.

Everyone ends up agreeing to sleep in their own bedrooms tonight.

“I’d highly advise you all to not leave your rooms tonight,” Maki says as everyone crowds around outside the dormitory. “I’m not forcing you all to stay inside but exploring the school, especially alone at night, is just asking for trouble. Shirogane is currently in her room inside of the school but I don’t think she’s going to do anything tonight. I’ll keep tabs on her just in case.”

“Are you going to guard the dormitory?” Tenko asks.

“Yeah, something like that,” Maki responds. She holds up a hand as Tenko opens her mouth. “And no, I don’t think we should take shifts. You all need to conserve your energy as much as possible.”

“Will you wake us if the exit is fixed?” Kiibo asks.

“Of course I will,” Maki answers, sounding a little put off that Kiibo asked in the first place.

“I am hoping the exit is fixed soon,” Kirumi says. “I overheard the Monokubs today discuss how they’re almost done sorting out all of the motives. I don’t doubt that tomorrow is going to be a tricky day if we’re all still stuck here.”

"I think one of the motives has already come into play," Kokichi mumbles, crossing his arms.

Maki rolls her eyes impatiently. "I highly doubt that. Shirogane probably wants to throw everything at us at once. Are you trying to make everyone paranoid?"

Kokichi stares at her with a frown. "No-"

"Please don't fight!" Gonta intervenes. "Gonta no like seeing friends argue!"

"Oh, I wasn't aware that we're all friends here," Korekiyo says.

"W-Well Gonta see everyone as friend," Gonta responds quietly. "Even you, Shinguji."

"Is that so?" Korekiyo rubs his chin as the corners of his eyes crinkle in amusement. "That's very interesting. I suppose I hold no qualms about that, although I unfortunately don't share your sentiment, Gokuhara. Making friends in a situation like this is rather silly. After all, if the exit isn't fixed in time then we're all going to die in three days. Making friends seems counterproductive if you think about it from that angle."

"Um, Angie thinks it's weird you said that so calmly," Angie admits before clasping her hands together. "But Angie's God also told her that he'll welcome her with open arms if anything bad happens to her so Angie isn't scared!"

"Guys, shouldn't we be a bit more optimistic?" Kaito sighs. "C'mon, enough with the doom and gloom already!"

"That's right! If Harukawa thinks that Iruma can get us out of here then we're just going to have to trust that she's right!" Tenko says before punching the air with an enthusiastic yell. "Tenko believes in Harukawa's friend!"

"I already said that Iruma isn't my friend," Maki grumbles.

Everyone starts to head inside of the dormitory one by one as the conversation slowly dies down. Kaito is mildly surprised, however, when Kirumi approaches him holding something in her arms. Then his eyes go wide as he realises she's holding his *jacket*.

"You found my jacket!" Kaito excitedly takes it from her and holds it out in front of himself to examine it. It looks like it's been recently washed. It smells clean and looks fresh. Kaito grins as he looks at the starry fabric that he stitched onto the inside of his jacket. "Where'd you find this?"

"Ah..." Kirumi's smile tightens. "Momota, I don't want to alarm you but the state your jacket was in when I found it was...concerning to say the least. It was covered in blood."

"Huh? *Really?!'*" Kaito almost drops his jacket because of her confession.

Kirumi nods. "I was exploring when I ended up inside of a hangar. What I found inside was...disturbing."

It feels like his stomach is starting to knot together. "R-Really?"

"I will spare you the details but I ended up finding your jacket pressed between a hydraulic press. In fact, I only spotted it because I saw a purple sleeve dangling from the sides," Kirumi says. She starts to grimace. "For a moment I truly thought that a body had been crushed. I'm...glad I was mistaken."

Kaito shudders and tightens his grip on his jacket to comfort himself. “Shit...are you okay?”

“Of course I am,” Kirumi says. “And I’m glad I’ve reunited you with your jacket. When I noticed the pattern inside of it I had a feeling it belonged to you. I washed it with only the basics since I wasn’t sure if you have any skin allergies but if you want me to wash it again with any different-”

“Nah, I’m fine with how it is!” Kaito tells her before slinging his jacket over his shoulder. Man, he has *really* missed the comforting weight of his jacket! He looks down at it with a soft smile.

“Seriously, thank you for finding it *and* for cleaning it too! You’re an awesome sidekick!”

“There’s no need to thank me. It’s my duty as a maid to make sure everyone here is comfortable and as happy as they can be,” Kirumi says. “It pleases me that I have reunited you with your jacket. I didn’t know it meant so much to you.”

“Are you *kidding*? This jacket is literally my most prized possession!” Kaito responds. He stretches his arm out and shows off the inside. “I stitched the starry fabric onto my jacket all by myself! Doesn’t it look so cool?”

“Indeed, you did an excellent job.” Kirumi leans in closer to examine the stitching. She checks his handiwork with a satisfied nod. “An excellent job indeed.”

“Haha, well, my grandmother taught me how to stitch and she’s super good at it,” Kaito tells her. “Like, scarily good.”

Kirumi smiles warmly before clearing her throat. “Ah, it seems Harukawa wants to talk to you.” Kaito turns around and notices Maki staring at them both from under the gazebo. A vine of wisteria keeps her half hidden. “It would be rude of me to make her wait so I’ll head off to bed so I can get some rest. I advise you to do the same as soon as you can, Momota. I have a feeling tomorrow is going to be a long day.”

She bows before leaving, her skirts swishing around her knees as she heads to her bedroom. Kaito waves at her until she’s out of sight. Man, Kirumi is so cool. His opinion of her has definitely gone up, especially since she found his jacket and cleaned it for him. He’s glad Kirumi is around.

“Hello.”

“Ack!” Kaito jumps as Maki suddenly appears next to him. She looks up at him with a raised eyebrow, her expression flat as he quickly plays off his moment of fear with a loud laugh. “Hey! I, ah, totally didn’t see you there.”

“I noticed,” Maki says.

“So, um...” Kaito clears his throat. Shit, now Maki is going to think he’s super uncool because he got spooked so easily. Maybe if he distracts her quick enough then she’ll forget that she managed to scare him. “Any ideas on how you’re going to sort out the Exisals?”

“Not just yet,” Maki admits, huffing so hard that she ends up blowing her fringe from her face. He watches as the brown strands of hair flutter back into place. “They always walk around as a group and I’m not stupid enough to take them all on at once.”

“Then gather a group of people and-”

“I don’t want help,” Maki instantly responds before he can even finish. “And I’ve already made it clear that everyone needs to preserve as much energy as possible. Besides, I work better alone.”

She looks away awkwardly, fumbling with her hair as her cheeks puff out. Kaito hums before saying, “well have you tried to work in a group before? Maybe you’ll be surprised at how well you might work with others.”

“No offence but I just see teammates as obstacles in my field of work,” Maki says. “Assassins aren’t exactly known for working in groups. Even pairs are rare. I just don’t want to deal with the fallout if I accidentally hurt someone.”

Oh, so she’s worried about accidentally hurting someone. I suppose that’s understandable but still, she’s going to burn herself out if she tries to do everything alone. I wonder if there’s something I can do to help her? I know she doesn’t want help with anything but there must be something I can do to cheer her up!

“Momota, do...” Maki wavers for a moment before continuing. “Do you...want to sit with me on the grass for just a moment?”

“Huh?” Kaito blinks. Despite it being dark out, he still notices how Maki’s cheeks turn a dusty pink. She’s struggling to look him in the eye. He can’t lie, he didn’t expect her to ask him that. However, what sort of man would he be if he turned down such a request? “Yeah, sure!”

Maki seems pleased with his response and quietly leads them both over to a patch of grass near the dormitory. The blades of grass tickle his ankles as he sits down, watching as Maki kneels across from him. He vaguely wonders if the grass is real or if it’s actually plastic. He can feel dirt creep into his fingernails so he has a feeling that the grass *must* be real.

There’s something cosy about sitting down with her, just the two of them and the night sky keeping them company. Still, there’s something bothering him. It’s not like Maki isn’t enough for him! It just feels like they’re missing someone, that’s all.

Kaito gets himself comfortable, using his hands to keep himself upright as stretches back. He really should be trying to get some sleep right now but there’s something about sitting with Maki that relaxes him, that puts him at ease. *I’ve missed this* he thinks before swallowing hard.

Wait, how can I miss something that I haven’t done before? Unless...

The silence is peaceful but Kaito can’t help but long for the sound of cicadas chirping in the grass, to hear a slight breeze weave through the trees and make the leaves tremble. He used to spend a lot of time outside as a kid. Most of his evenings were spent wading through too long grass and shrieking when crickets jumped out at him. He remembers how the sun used to keep him warm and how the stars guided him home.

When he looks up at the sky now he can’t help but feel disappointed. The stars look gorgeous but they’re fake. A projection.

Maki squirms as she gets comfortable, tucking her skirt around her thighs. “We...” She chews her lip before sighing softly, a melancholic smile tugging at her lips before she shoos it away. “We used to sit out here together at night during the first game. Do you...”

Do you remember? He knows that’s what she wants to ask him and it absolutely devastates him that the answer is no. Something about being with her under the pale moonlight is familiar and if he thinks really hard, he thinks he can see images that look phantasmagorical, images that are distant and dreamlike. He thinks that she used to sit next to him with a stony face. Someone else is with them both too. Someone with midnight blue hair and golden eyes that look like they belong inside a treasure chest.

I want to remember but no matter how hard I try...

“Never mind,” Maki quickly says. She twists her hair around her fingers quietly and glares down at the grass as if it has just personally offended her. “Forget I said anything.”

Unfortunately, it’s easier if he does.

He doesn’t want them both to bask in an awkward silence however so he asks, “so...how are you doing?”

“I’m fine,” Maki tells him. “I must admit that it’s a little strange to be back here but at least I’m familiar with my surroundings. Once I have Shirogane apprehended and the Monokubs sorted out, I think I’ll feel more satisfied.”

“Just make sure you don’t push yourself, yeah?” Kaito tugs at a clump of grass with his fingers. “And remember that everyone appreciates what you’re doing even though they might not show it.”

“I’m not expecting much from anyone,” Maki admits. “And it’s not like I can blame them. I think I’d be sceptical if someone told me I was inside of a simulation. In fact, I doubt I’d even believe them.” She swallows. “I appreciate that you, um, believed me right away. Thanks. If you weren’t around to encourage everyone then I doubt anyone would’ve believed me.”

“Nah, I don’t think that’s right,” Kaito says. “I mean, yeah, I think a couple of people would’ve tried to deny everything for a while but when you said that we’re in a simulation...it just felt right, you know? It’s like you told me something that was just sitting on the tip of my tongue.”

“Still...thanks for having my back,” Maki responds and to Kaito’s amusement, she sounds almost *shy*.

“Well of course I’m gonna have your back!” Kaito slams his fists together, causing the grass he had gathered in his hands to scatter everywhere. “You’re my...”

Sidekick.

Maki looks at him with hopeful eyes and Kaito blames the lighting for how angelic she suddenly looks. He thinks wow, Maki sure is pretty. Because she is pretty. Her eyes are a ruby red and her skin is like moonlight. *Man, I hope she finds a really nice guy to be with in the future. She deserves to be happy.*

He cuts himself off by sneezing loudly. Whoops, maybe scattering grass around like a madman wasn’t the best idea. Maki looks unimpressed as he sniffs bashfully. Wow, good thing they weren’t having some sort of moment because he would’ve totally just ruined the mood otherwise!

She clicks her tongue as she brushes a couple of pieces of grass from her hair. “Honestly...you can be so childish, Momota.”

“H-Hey!” Kaito defensively juts his lip out. “What do you mean by that?!”

“Nothing,” Maki says. She suddenly looks concerned, as if his sneezing reminded her of something dreadful. “Momota...are you, um...do you remember if you’re...”

“Is something wrong?”

Maki pauses before continuing. “During each game you always ended up becoming...ill. Really ill.”

“Hah? Really?” Kaito’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise.

“I wasn’t sure if you were always ill from the start or if it was something that just happened at a predetermined point,” Maki tells him. “During each game, you always ended up falling ill a couple of days in. Like, coughing up blood ill. I overheard you during the last game telling...*someone* that you were used to being ill but looking at you right now...”

“I’m...not ill?” Kaito feels like he’s asking a question more so than making a statement. “I don’t... remember ever getting sick as a child and I think I’d know if I was sick with something serious.”

“I...I see,” Maki murmurs. “Then it’s like I thought, you only remember your illness at a predetermined time. Or perhaps something triggers a fake memory that makes you think you’re ill.”

“Oh!” Kaito pretends that a sudden spark of anxiety doesn’t fire up his veins. “That’s...”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you,” Maki says. “I just thought I should ask. You don’t usually get sick until a couple of days in so I doubt you’re actually going to have to experience whatever fake illness you’re gonna think you have.”

Haha, what the fuck? Kaito laughs nervously. “Y-Yeah, what a relief.”

Maki must’ve realised that revealing such a thing has dampened the conversation. Her face twists as she thinks of something else to say. “I, um, I hope people haven’t been giving you grief for taking my side. I know that you just want to help everyone and I...I know out of everyone here, you’re the perfect person to keep everyone optimistic and safe.”

“You think so?” Kaito proudly puffs his chest out. “I mean, *yeah*, it’s going to be a little tricky getting everyone comfortable but I’m up for the task! Tojo even offered to help me too!”

“Did she?” Maki asks. The pink tinge on her cheeks turns red. “I see.”

Huh...she suddenly looks...really jealous? Nah, that can’t be right! Why would Maki be jealous of Kirumi?

“Yeah, she’s my sidekick!” Kaito tells her and misses how Maki bites down hard on her tongue. “I mean, she even found my jacket! She’s so cool!”

“...I suppose she is,” Maki quietly responds.

Kaito sighs happily and sneaks a glance up at the sky. Man, if only they were actually outside right now. He can’t wait to get out of here. A small part of him is grateful that he doesn’t remember anything about the previous killing games. Whilst things are peaceful right now, he doesn’t doubt that horrible things have happened within this confined space.

He worries his lip between his teeth. The fact that he’s here means he’s died several times before. He just...well, he just really hopes he hasn’t caused someone to die here. He feels his stomach clench. He’s not sure how he feels about not knowing why he’s here at the moment, trapped in a simulation. Did someone kill him? Did his fated illness get the better of him?

Did he kill someone and get caught?

“Momota, what’s wrong?”

Maki peers at him curiously, failing to hide the worried glint in her eyes.

“Hey, can you be totally honest with me?” Kaito asks. He digs his hands back into the grass, feeling fresh dirt squeeze into his fingernails. Maki nods slowly and Kaito takes a deep breath, feeling like he’s standing on the edge of a very tall cliff. “Have I...killed someone before?”

Maki freezes and her red eyes look anywhere but at him for a moment. Kaito feels his heart leap into his throat. *Oh*. The fact that she can’t even look at him...fuck, does that mean he *has* bloodied his hands before? Has he...actually stooped down to such a disgusting low-

“*No*.” Kaito jolts as Maki looks at him firmly, a scarily serious look on her face. Her hands are clenched on her lap. “No you haven’t.”

“O-Oh...” His stomach feels so tight and twisted, like it’s a wind-up toy whose key has been turned but someone is stopping it from spinning. He looks at Maki, looks her directly in the eyes. She’s... she’s telling the truth, right? He trusts that...she’s not lying. Kaito licks his lips. “That’s...a relief to hear.”

Maki averts her gaze. “Yes, well, you’re a good person, Momota. Too good.”

“Eh?”

“...forget it,” Maki mumbles. “And please don’t stress yourself out about any of the previous games. You haven’t done anything wrong, I promise.”

Maybe it’s because Maki is telling him what he wants to hear but he believes her. Trusts her.

“Ahaha, sorry if I made things tense,” Kaito says with an apologetic smile. “I just...yeah, I just wanted to ask.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Maki responds. “Really.”

Kaito sighs and contemplates lying down onto the grass so he can get more comfortable when something catches his attention. He notices Maki glaring at the dormitory, her expression dark and vexed. He sits up straight, preparing himself to ask her what’s wrong when the dormitory doors open and Kaito watches as someone stumbles out.

“What the hell does he want?” Maki mutters under her breath as Kokichi steps outside, head down and his hair messy.

The smaller male clearly doesn’t notice them both as he pauses as if contemplating something before staggering past the gazebo silently. Kaito raises an eyebrow at Kokichi’s strange behaviour. He’s walking as if he’s drunk and if he’s not careful then he’s going to end up falling down the stone steps.

“Hey, Ouma? Where are you going?” Kaito calls after him, ignoring Maki’s hisses for him to stay seated as he pulls himself up. He frowns as Kokichi blanks him completely, only pausing momentarily before shuffling his feet across the floor. “What the hell?”

Why is he being so rude? He heard me, right? Maki already told us that we shouldn’t explore alone at night so why is he actively ignoring her advice? Man, I really don’t get Kokichi sometimes.

Kokichi takes another step, almost tripping over his own feet during the process. Kaito’s frown deepens as he realises Kokichi isn’t wearing any shoes, which is actually kind of strange. Sure, Gonta doesn’t wear any shoes but Kaito’s already used to seeing the gentle giant walk around barefooted. Kokichi doesn’t seem like the sort of person who walks around with no shoes on for no

reason at all.

“Ouma! Don’t just ignore me!”

Kokichi does pause when Kaito calls his name and turns his head. The astronaut takes a step back when he sees Kokichi’s face. His eyes are half lidded, glazed over and extremely unfocused.

“*H-Holy shit*, Harukawa,” Kaito stammers as he takes a large step back. “He’s fucking *possessed!*”

Maki looks at him with an expression that screams *are you serious right now?* She sighs impatiently and clicks her tongue. “No he’s not. He’s sleepwalking.”

“Oh!” That makes much more sense! He pretends that his face isn’t turning bright red and puts a hand on his hip, trying to salvage his reputation by standing in what he thinks is a cool pose. “What should we do?”

“What do you mean?” Maki arches an eyebrow. “Just leave him be.”

“But you were the one who said it’s dangerous to explore the school alone,” Kaito says before pointing at the still stumbling Kokichi. “And he’s not even conscious right now! Anything could happen!”

She’s clearly unimpressed as Kaito slowly approaches Kokichi. “But I wanted to spend time with...” She doesn’t finish her sentence.

“We’ll have plenty of time to hang out later!” Kaito promises her with a grin. “But I can’t in good conscience just let him stumble around in the dark! I’ll just lead him back to bed and...head to bed myself since tomorrow is going to be a long day.”

He can tell she’s disappointed as she pouts before sighing. “...okay.”

Kaito does genuinely feel bad that their time together has been cut short but he also doesn’t want Kokichi to fall down the stairs and hurt himself. He’s nearing the edge of the stone steps when Kaito intervenes, carefully putting a hand down on Kokichi’s shoulder and saying, “Ouma, it’s Momota. I’m just going to walk you back to your room, okay?”

Kokichi huffs but is surprisingly docile as Kaito presses down on his shoulder gently. He sways quietly as Kaito frowns.

He’s so warm. Freakishly warm. And that’s just his shoulder. He can feel heat radiating from Kokichi even through his uniform, which he mustn’t have taken off before going to sleep. “Hold on just a moment...”

“What’s wrong?” Maki asks, frowning slightly as Kaito hesitates.

“He’s *really* warm,” Kaito tells her, chewing his lip before placing his other hand on Kokichi’s forehead. His eyes go wide as he’s met with an intense heat that warms even his bones. “Fuck...”

“Momota?”

“I think he’s sick,” Kaito says, brushing a couple of sweaty purple locks from Kokichi’s forehead so he can press his hand against it properly. Kokichi huffs once again, a crease growing between his brows. He’s clearly not happy that Kaito keeps checking his temperature. “Hey, you don’t think this has something to do with Shirogane’s motive, right?”

“She did say she was going to spread a disease,” Maki responds. Her frown deepens.

Besides, it would be wishful thinking to think that Kokichi is only coincidentally sick. Kokichi ducks his head, mumbling something indecipherable as he tries to walk away. Kaito keeps a gentle but firm hand on his shoulder.

“What should we do?” Kaito asks.

Maki shrugs. “I don’t think there’s actually much we *can* do until we know what’s wrong with him and I doubt Shirogane is going to offer us an explanation tonight. Just...put him in his room so he doesn’t spread anything and wash your hands as soon as you’re done, okay? I don’t want you catching whatever he has.”

Shit. Kaito coaxes Kokichi quietly back into the dormitory, biting the inside of his mouth every time the smaller male stumbles. Maki watches them both silently. Kaito can tell she’s annoyed. Frustrated. He just hopes her anger is directed at Tsumugi for causing this. He has a slight feeling that might not be the case.

The trek up the stairs is a long one as Kokichi takes a while to head up each step. It makes Kaito wonder how he even got down them in the first place without hurting himself. Kokichi’s bedroom door is already cracked open ever so slightly when he reaches it. He knocks it open with his arm and ushers Kokichi inside. He almost does a double take as he sees how messy Kokichi’s room is and he wonders how he’s managed to cause such a mess in such a short amount of time.

He ignores the mess and guides Kokichi back to his bed. His bedsheets have been flung to the side. Clearly Kokichi must’ve been tossing and turning before deciding to take a little midnight stroll.

“C’mon dude, time to get into bed,” Kaito says quietly as Kokichi merely stands next to his bed.

His luck must’ve run out as Kokichi simply stands still, swaying ever so slightly. It looks like he’s simply staring at his bed but since he’s not awake Kaito knows that’s not the case. Kaito scratches his head as he tries to figure out what to do next.

“Dude, you’re right in front of your bed. Get into it,” Kaito tells him, thumping the mattress with his hand.

Kokichi miraculously listens to him and Kaito sighs in relief. He watches as Kokichi lies down slowly. Kaito does roll his eyes when Kokichi simply lies there but he supposes Kokichi literally is asleep so it was stupid of him to expect Kokichi to throw a blanket over himself.

“Geez...I don’t care if you’re hot, you need your blanket, man,” Kaito mumbles to himself as he pulls a blanket over the smaller male. He even goes out of his way to smooth out all of the creases because he’s *nice* like that.

Kokichi sighs as Kaito pulls away, his hair splayed over his face, sticking to his clammy skin. It frustrates Kaito just looking at it so he instinctively brushes the messier strands out of the way, wincing as his fingers make contact with Kokichi’s boiling skin. Fuck, the heat coming from him is *abnormal*.

Kaito grimaces. He feels like he shouldn’t just leave Kokichi but he doubts there’s much he can do for him at the moment. Besides, he can’t risk catching what he has either. He needs to wash his hands and change his clothes before heading to bed.

He leaves the room as quietly as he can, carefully closing the door with a click. He’ll gear himself up and check on him again in the morning. Surely there must be some masks lying around

somewhere.

Kaito spots Maki waiting by her bedroom door, her arms crossed tightly. “Did he give you any hassle?”

“Of course not! He’s fast asleep,” Kaito responds. “I mean, I thought he wasn’t going to get into bed for a moment but then he just got in so...yeah, no hassle.”

“Right...” Maki purses her lips. “Make sure you wash your hands and change your clothes. Seriously, I don’t want you getting ill.”

“Well I don’t plan on getting ill!” Kaito reassures her with a light-hearted grin. “Anyway, I should probably go and get some rest. Looks like tomorrow is gonna be a little more hectic than I thought it was going to be!”

“...yes, it does seem that way,” Maki agrees. “Goodnight, Momota.”

““Night, Harukawa!”

He heads to his room and cleans himself up. As he changes out of his clothes he can’t help but sigh to himself. It really does look like tomorrow is going to be rough.

Alone in his bedroom, Kaito starts to worry.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not ending this fic until Kaito makes everyone his sidekick /j

Final Loop - Chapter 1 Part 3

Chapter Notes

Thanks to everyone who has left a kudo and comment!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

Have a nice day!

Kaito finds a packet of masks and a box of rubber gloves in the warehouse. The moment he had woken up, he had sprung out of bed and made an instant beeline towards the school, telling Maki who had been sitting on the steps in the dormitory that he would be gone for only a couple of minutes.

As he slips on a mask, Maki watches him quietly. She opens her mouth a couple of times as if to say something but suddenly retreats each time. Kaito wonders if there's something bothering her. He'll have to ask her later.

Kokichi's room is still a mess when he enters it, which doesn't exactly surprise him since Kokichi is obviously too ill to clean it. Kokichi is still curled up on his bed and to Kaito's surprise, Kokichi hasn't kicked off the blankets he had tucked over him last night.

Under the lazy morning light Kaito is able to see how, how to put this nicely, *bad* Kokichi looks. His face is pale, spare his cheeks, which are flushed dark pink. There's dried sweat collecting in his hairline. There's even dark smudges under his eyes, which makes Kaito wonder if Kokichi had been waking up periodically throughout the night. Kaito hesitates before putting his hand on the smaller male's forehead, wincing as he's once again met with a heat that could even rival the sun's.

Fuck, he really is sick. I was really hoping he had some temporary bug but that clearly was just wishful thinking. This has got to be the disease Tsumugi told us about, right? There's no way Kokichi is only coincidentally ill right now.

He finds an unused flannel in the en suite bathroom and runs it under cold water until it's soaked. When he returns, Kokichi is still fast asleep on his bed, his back turned to the astronaut. Man, he must be *really* out of it to have not woken up yet. Even though Kaito is trying his best to be quiet, he must admit he probably would've woken up by now if he thought someone was in his room.

Kokichi's nose wrinkles when Kaito places the flannel down carefully over the boy's forehead. Kaito thumbs away a trickle of water that tries to slide down Kokichi's cheek, catching it just as it reaches his cheekbone. Unfortunately for him, Kokichi decides that *now* is an excellent time to open his eyes and Kaito pulls his hand away quickly before Kokichi realises what's going on.

There's still a glassy look in his eyes, something glazed and sickly. Kokichi blinks a couple of times, slow and groggy before croaking out, "Momota?"

"Haha, yeah, that's me!" Kaito quickly says, swallowing as Kokichi continues to look up at him with what can only be described as a disorientated look on his face. "Hey, how are you feeling? I,

ah, found you outside sleepwalking last night.”

Kokichi stares at him owlishly, a slight crease growing between his brows. “I was? I don’t remember.”

“I’m not surprised, you seemed really out of it last night, man,” Kaito says. “And, well, you’re still not looking so good if I’m being honest. You’re still really warm, like, warm enough for me to cook breakfast on you!”

Kaito’s stomach growls and he suddenly remembers that he’s not going to be able to eat for a while. He smiles pitifully to himself. Ah, perhaps that wasn’t the best thing to say. Remembering that he’s not going to be able to eat for a couple of days quickly dampens his mood.

Kokichi pauses before lifting a hand up to delicately touch the flannel on his forehead, pulling away quickly when he causes a gush of water to dribble down his face. “Did you put this on me?”

“Yeah, because you’re burning up,” Kaito responds, a small frown growing on his face as he realises how muddled Kokichi is acting. “You good, man? You’re acting really out of it. I mean, I suppose you have a fever but...”

Kokichi doesn’t seem like the type of person to allow himself to act so vulnerable in front of someone he doesn’t know. Maybe it just takes him a little while to wake up properly? Still, it just doesn’t feel right that he’s so out of it right now. Shit, did I fuck up by leaving him alone? It’s just, I don’t really know what’s wrong with him and I don’t want to catch what he has, which now that I think about it sounds super fucking selfish of me but I do have a group to look after.

Kaito tries to force away the guilt that is oppressively making itself known. He steels himself. He was taught during astronaut training that sometimes when you’re the team leader you have to make choices that are going to suck. Sometimes he’s going to have to let one person suffer if it means the rest of the group remains safe.

He notices the flannel on Kokichi’s forehead start to slip and quickly nudges it back into place before it can fall, causing Kokichi to look up at him with a surprised expression.

“Man, you really *are* out of it,” Kaito murmurs.

“I think I’m ill,” Kokichi tells him before putting a hand to his mouth, looking like he can’t believe he just said that. His eyes flicker through several emotions, as if struggling to figure out how to react. He mostly just looks confused. “Oh, I...”

Sounds like he didn’t mean to say that. He almost looks frustrated with himself. Man, Kokichi needs to loosen up a little. Does he think I’m going to react badly to him being ill? Tch, I’m not going to get pissed at him for something he can’t control.

“You think?” Kaito responds, hoping to lighten the mood up with some careful teasing. Kokichi, however, most likely doesn’t hear him as he’s too busy glaring down at his lap, chewing on his lip. Kaito sighs. “Hey, so I don’t want to worry you or anything but I have a feeling you might have that disease Shirogane was on about yesterday.”

Kokichi groans, rubbing sleep out of his eyes with a tired grumble. “Yeah, I thought that was the case. Shit...”

Kaito makes a sympathetic noise before giving Kokichi a guilty smile. “Look, I’m going to be straightforward with you, man. Until we figure out what’s wrong with you, I don’t think it’s safe for anyone else to be around you right now. I’m not trying to purposely isolate you from everyone

but...”

“No, no, what you’re saying makes sense,” Kokichi sighs. His frown grows deeper and he mumbles quietly, “I didn’t mean to say that.”

“Huh?” Kaito raises an eyebrow. “What do you mean?”

“I mean I keep impulsively saying things I don’t want to say out loud,” Kokichi answers before slapping a hand over his mouth with a scowl. It’s a struggle to hear what Kokichi says next since his hand is in the way but Kaito swears he hears Kokichi mumble a very quiet, “*and I don’t know why.*”

“Hey, you don’t have to cover your mouth like that in front of me,” Kaito tells him, stopping himself at the last second as he goes to move Kokichi’s hand. That probably isn’t a very smart idea. “You know you can trust me, right?”

Kokichi’s hand isn’t enough to muffle out his response. “Of course I trust you, Momota.”

Kaito blinks as Kokichi suddenly looks mortified. His hand starts to tremble in front of his mouth and Kaito isn’t sure whether it is out of embarrassment or if it’s because Kokichi is ill.

It bothers Kaito that Kokichi looks so upset at the moment. It bothers him that Kokichi looks furious that he admitted such a thing. There’s nothing wrong with trusting people but Kokichi clearly thinks otherwise. He looks like he’s seconds away from chomping down on his own tongue. Kaito clears his throat, gaining Kokichi’s attention.

“Ouma, there’s nothing wrong with wanting to trust me, you know?” Kaito tells him. “It’s actually a relief to hear you say that if I’m being completely honest-”

“Well I didn’t mean to say it,” Kokichi insists fervently, quickly ducking his head down to avoid any further eye contact. “It just came out, it’s like I can’t stop myself. As soon as I open my mouth I just keep saying things I would never dare say to someone and...” Kokichi’s eyes go wide as he keeps on talking and talking. He flounders before grabbing his scarf and shoves it into his mouth, the tips of his ears turning pink as he continues to speak regardless of his scarf.

Oh man, this is actually upsetting him a lot more than I expected. He...he really doesn’t like saying what’s actually on his mind, does he? Is this a side effect of the disease? Fuck, the only way to find out is to ask Tsumugi and I feel like if I see her right now then I’m going to do something I’ll end up regretting later on. It’s just, what’s going on with Kokichi is really not normal. If he was delirious right now then I’d understand but he’s clearly not.

“Hey, hey, hey, calm down,” Kaito says, hiding a grimace as Kokichi looks up at him. At least he stops talking. “Okay, look, clearly *something* strange is going on with you and I’m going to try and figure out how to help. Just...” He scratches the back of his head. “Try not to worry, okay? I’m sure everything is going to be fine. No, I *know* that everything is going to be okay.”

Kokichi’s scarf drops onto his lap as his jaw hangs open. He gawks at Kaito as if he’s hanging onto his every last word, eyes wide with childlike belief. “O-Oh...okay then.”

There’s something surreal about how Kokichi believes him just like that. However, Kaito isn’t going to complain. It *is* weird as fuck how a fever has affected Kokichi’s personality so much but Kaito doubts that this is just any regular fever. *Ugh*, it’s inevitable but he’s going to have to hunt down Tsumugi and get some answers from her. Kaito wonders if Maki knows where she is.

Kaito gnaws on the inside of his mouth. He doesn’t want to just, well, *leave*. Even if Kokichi is up

and talking, he's still ill and fevers are something you don't just ignore. Kaito could stay in here and look after him but, shit, call him selfish but he doesn't want to catch something that's going to render him bedbound. He needs to be in tip top condition so he can guide everyone out of this mess!

He rubs his goatee slowly, wracking his brain for ideas. He's not sure how infectious Kokichi is so whoever he nominates to look after him is going to have to wear a mask and gloves at all times to keep themselves protected. Even then, there's always a risk of them catching something regardless. Then, as if a lightbulb has just flickered to life above his head, Kaito realises he won't have to worry about all of that if he asks Kiibo to keep an eye on Kokichi.

Robots can't get sick, right? *And* Kiibo seems nice enough. He seems to favour logic over everything else so if Kokichi *does* start to get a little rambunctious from being stuck in bed for too long, Kiibo should be able to talk him out of running amok. Hopefully. Besides, both Kiibo and Kokichi seemed like they got on well with each other yesterday, even though Kokichi had spent most of his time teasing the poor robot.

"Okay, so here's what's going to happen," Kaito says, slapping a fisted hand down onto his free palm. "I'm going to ask Kiibo to look after you whilst I figure out what's going on. Does that sound good to you? You trust Kiibo, right?"

"Of course I trust Kiibo," Kokichi responds before scowling once again, biting down hard on his lip.

Kaito frowns. "Dude, you're going to bust your lip if you keep doing that."

Kokichi grumbles under his breath but does let go of his lip, which is already starting to turn red. If he keeps this up then he's going to make himself bleed and Kaito doubts Kokichi wants to deal with that on top of being ill too.

It's annoying but Kaito can't tell if Kokichi is actually being genuine about trusting Kiibo. Kokichi just seems to be automatically trusting everything Kaito says at the moment. He wonders if this trust is only reserved for him or if Kokichi suddenly had a change of heart overnight and trusts everyone now. Something clearly isn't right.

Maki is waiting for him as he leaves Kokichi's room, closing the door behind him gently. She has her arms crossed by her chest. Kaito can't help but notice the new belt she has looped around her waist, which has several sheaths dangling from it, all of them filled with knives. He looks at her expectantly and she sighs.

"Well obviously I needed to arm myself if I wanted to guard the dormitory properly," Maki tells him. She starts to pout. "All of the weapons in my lab had been swapped out with toys a while back so I had to improvise. All of these knives are from the kitchen."

"You went into the kitchen during the night?" Kaito asks. "I thought that wasn't allowed."

"So?" Maki rolls her eyes. "A couple of the Monokubs showed up in their Exisals when I was inside and I told them what I'd do to them if they tried to punish me. They quickly backed off after that."

"O-Oh? Is that so?" Kaito tries not to feel intimidated but a shudder runs up his spine regardless.

"I think even they've realised that the rules are pointless now," Maki says. "Either that or they actually see me as a threat." She looks rather satisfied with the idea of that.

Even though she's trying to act nonchalant, Maki looks tired. There's nothing about her posture that suggests she hasn't had any sleep however. The only dead giveaway are the slight bags under her eyes, although it seems Maki has no qualms about letting people see them. Kaito wonders if Maki is the type of girl who cares about her appearance or not. The only accessories she's wearing are a pin and her scrunchies, which Kaito presumes she's only wearing to keep her hair out of her face.

Now that I think about it, wouldn't having long hair be an inconvenience for an assassin? What if they leave a strand behind at the scene of the crime? I suppose since Maki is the Ultimate Assassin she doesn't have to worry about things like that.

"Hey, do you want to lie down for a couple of hours?" Kaito suggests, clearly catching Maki by surprise as she stares at him dumbfoundedly. "You've been up all night, right? I'm sure I can handle things for a few hours-"

"I don't have time to rest right now," Maki tells him. "I appreciate the concern but I'll get some sleep when things have settled down. Until an exit is secured, I don't want to lower my guard. No offence but I'm pretty sure *I'm* the only reason why Shirogane and the Monokubs aren't personally tormenting you all at the moment."

She's probably right. Maki is a very menacing person on the inside *and* outside too.

"But that doesn't mean you have to burn yourself out," Kaito insists. "I mean, *yeah*, I'm grateful that you're being such a huge help but I don't want you exhausting yourself either, Harukawa. How about this? Promise me that if you end up feeling too worn out, you'll come straight to me and I'll take over for you for a while. How's that sound?"

Maki lets out a resigned sigh. "Okay, fine. If that's what it takes to make you stop worrying then I agree to those terms."

"Well I'd be a pretty lousy leader if I didn't worry about everyone's wellbeing!" Kaito responds before pressing his fists together. "Which reminds me, I need to ask Kiibo if he can watch over Ouma for a while. He's really sick, Harukawa. Like *sick*, sick."

Maki pulls a face. "Do you think he caught the disease Shirogane threatened to spread?"

"Yeah, there's no doubt about it," Kaito answers with a sigh. "But I don't really fully understand what's wrong with him, which is why I want to ask Shirogane what's actually up with him as soon as I can. It seems like he has a fever but there's something else that's bothering me."

"You don't think Ouma's going to be a threat, do you?" Maki asks, immediately tensing up. Her hand instinctively reaches for a knife.

"What? *No!*" Kaito shakes his head. "If anything, he's the exact *opposite* of a threat! I'm more worried about someone hurting *him* than him hurting anyone else."

"Oh." Maki relaxes her hand. Kaito can't lie, it does concern him ever so slightly that the first conclusion Maki jumped to was that Kokichi could be a potential threat. He's fucking *ill*. Kokichi is more likely to cause damage to himself by tripping over his own feet than him hurting someone else at the moment. She frowns. "What about Ouma is bothering you then?"

He's caught off guard as he suddenly hesitates. Even though he's spent so much time defending her, Kaito realises that he's not sure whether to tell Maki about Kokichi's sudden change in personality. He trusts her, of course he fucking trusts her with his life. With Kokichi's however? A

cold realisation washes over him as he struggles to answer.

Kaito trusts Maki to keep him safe, to keep the group safe. Kokichi as an *individual* however?

What the hell is wrong with me? Of course Maki would never purposely hurt Kokichi! She obviously doesn't like him but that doesn't mean she's going to do something stupid like take advantage of him being ill. I just...I don't know why I'm hesitating! Everyone is going to find out about Kokichi sooner or later. Fuck, I really need to get a grip.

"I-I'm sure it's nothing!" Kaito decides to say. "I just don't think he has a regular sort of fever and I think Shirogane has infected him with something only she knows about."

"I see..." Maki puts a hand on her chin as she thinks. "I suppose that does make sense. After all, you also ended up infected with something unusual during the previous games too. Is Ouma... coughing up blood by any chance?"

"Coughing up *blood*?!" Kaito shakes his head wildly. "No! Wait, should he be?"

"Well if he just has a fever then of course not," Maki says with an exasperated sigh. "Although I doubt Shirogane is just going to reuse the same illness twice."

"I doubt she's going to be very cooperative but I would like to ask her what's wrong with Ouma," Kaito admits. "Just so we know what we're working with. If she has an ounce of decency then she'd at least let us know what's wrong with him."

Maki snorts humourlessly. "An ounce of decency? As if. Still..." She hums thoughtfully. "She probably wants to gloat about what she's done to Ouma so maybe you might find out what you need to know if you play along."

The idea frustrates him but she's probably right. "Damn it..."

"What are we doing with Ouma anyway?" Maki asks. "If he's ill then keeping him away from everyone is the smartest option. It would be an inconvenience if more people end up ill."

"Ouma didn't get ill on purpose, you know?" Kaito argues quietly, feeling oddly defensive. He looks away awkwardly as Maki purses her lips. "Anyway, I think it's for the best if we ask Kiibo to keep an eye on him from now on. I don't think robots can get sick." Kaito pauses. "Can they?"

"I doubt it," Maki says.

"I mean, I know what I'm asking is a lot but something just doesn't sit right with me leaving Ouma to look after himself," Kaito reveals. "And Kiibo and Ouma are sort of friends, right? Ouma didn't seem to mind Kiibo yesterday and Kiibo is obviously the safest person to ask to look after Ouma without compromising his health so..."

"Won't Ouma be bed bound anyway?" Maki points out. "Why does he need someone looking after him?"

Kaito raises an eyebrow. "Because looking after someone when they're sick is a nice thing to do? And there's the threat of the killing game constantly looming over us. Ouma's too sick to defend himself. I also don't want him sleepwalking out of his bedroom and spreading whatever he has by accident either."

"...right." Maki looks away. "Well, don't let me stop you then. Just, make sure you sanitise yourself as soon as possible. You were in Ouma's room before, right? I know you're wearing a

mask but you still should wash yourself anyway.”

He was planning to go in the shower afterwards anyway. Kaito nods half-heartedly and knocks on Kiibo’s door. The robot answers after a couple of moments and peers up at Kaito curiously.

“Oh, good morning, Momota!” Kiibo smiles awkwardly. “I, uh, wasn’t expecting to see you so early. Did something happen?”

“Nothing too serious,” Kaito quickly reassures him before putting a hand on his hip. “Listen, Ouma is really ill at the moment and I think he’s got that disease Shirogane was on about. He’s rather feverish and, uh...” He lowers his voice. “He’s not his usual self. I know I’m asking a lot of you but is there any chance you could look after him for the time being?”

“You want me to look after Ouma?” Kiibo blinks before smiling confidently. “Fufufu, of course I can do that! I’m glad you came to me for help, Momota!”

“Haha, yeah, well, you’re the best person to ask since you can’t get sick, right?” Kaito responds. “You know, because you’re a robot.”

Kiibo falters. “Just because I’m a robot doesn’t mean-”

“-you’re different from everyone else. I’ve heard you use that argument several times before,” Maki sighs from down the stairs. “I forgot how repetitive you are during the start of each game.”

“Ghk...” Kiibo recoils. “I wasn’t aware that I could be so annoying.”

“Dude, don’t be so self-deprecating!” Kaito tells him. “I think Harukawa is just a little tired right now, that’s all. Don’t mind her!”

“I don’t think I have the ability to *actually* be self-deprecating since I don’t experience emotions like you do,” Kiibo admits. He looks down at the floor dejectedly. “Anyway, you just want me to keep an eye on Ouma, correct? Is he in his room?”

“Yep!” Kaito nods quickly, amazed how quickly the conversation went downhill. “Hey, Kiibo? Are you sure you’re not capable of experiencing emotions? You seemed really discouraged right now.”

“I have the ability to express emotions on the outside,” Kiibo tells him. “But I don’t think I’ll ever have the chance to experience them *properly*. I’m not sure why but knowing that makes my software run a little less slower.”

Huh, I guess it never crossed my mind that Kiibo isn’t able to experience different emotions. Does that mean he doesn’t know what true joy feels like? Man, that’s actually really fucking sad. From what I’ve seen, he’s actually great at showing different expressions on his face but...I don’t know how I’d feel if I couldn’t wear my heart on my sleeve.

“Damn dude, that sucks,” Kaito murmurs. “I don’t know how I’d live without being able to express myself the way I want to!”

“Well, I’ve never experienced what it’s like to have emotions before so it’s not like I can miss having them,” Kiibo says. “I suppose it’s just wishful thinking that I might be able to one day truly express myself just like humans can. Perhaps...once we get out of here I could ask my professor to upgrade my AI.”

“That’s the spirit!” Kaito pumps his fist encouragingly.

Kaito spends the next hour thoroughly cleaning himself once he walks Kiibo to Kokichi's room. He doubts that he's caught anything since he feels completely fine but it doesn't stop him from worrying. Admittedly, the thing he's most worried about is not being able to help everyone if he ends up trapped in bed. He doesn't have time to be ill!

There's a knock on his door as he's towelling his hair dry. He drapes the towel around his shoulders and answers the door as quickly as he can, not wanting to make whoever is on the other side wait too long. He is mildly surprised to see Gonta, whose eyes light up the moment Kaito's door opens.

"Ah, good morning!" Gonta cheerfully says. He looks surprisingly well rested.

Kaito greets Gonta enthusiastically. "Hey, what's up, man?"

Gonta blinks before tilting his head up. "The...ceiling?"

Kaito splutters. "That's not what I meant!"

"Oh!" Gonta pauses. "The...sky, then?"

"Forget it," Kaito mumbles before the conversation gets any more confusing. He sighs and smiles helplessly. "Did you come and see me for any particular reason? That's what I was trying to ask, man."

Gonta's eyes brighten with realisation. "Oh, so *that's* what Momota meant! Sorry, Gonta must've gotten muddled." He smiles bashfully. "And, um, Gonta just wanted to ask if Momota needs help with anything today. Momota want to help everyone, right? So that makes Momota leader of everyone here!"

Kaito can't help but puff his chest out proudly. It's nice to know that he's left such a positive first impression. "I'm not sure if there's anything in particular for you to do if I'm being completely honest. I do want to gather everyone together and discuss what we should do as a group to keep safe--"

"So should Gonta gather everyone?" Gonta eagerly pumps his fists.

"Now?" Kaito pauses. Now that he thinks about it, shouldn't he be doing some sort of roll call to make sure that everyone is...alive? The very thought makes him shudder. The fact that he has to worry about someone dying in the first place makes his jaw lock with irritation. Seriously, *fuck* Tsumugi and *fuck* the Monokubs. "You know what, yeah, that's a good idea actually."

"Got it! Gonta will tell everyone to wake up because Momota said so," Gonta says.

"H-Hold on a second!" Kaito stops Gonta at the last second. The entomologist looks back at Kaito with a puzzled expression. "If you put it like that then people will get the wrong idea!" He needs to win everyone over and he doubts he's going to be able to do that if Gonta goes around ordering people to wake up because Kaito wants them to. Sure, he wants everyone to wake up but, tch, it's about the *tact*, man!

"Then...what should Gonta tell everyone?"

"Just knock on everyone's door and tell them to meet..." Hmm, he was about to say the dining hall but that sounds like an awful idea. He's trying to *up* morale, not crush it. "How about outside by the gazebo?" Yeah, that seems like a safe place to hold a meeting!

Gonta nods. "Okay, Gonta can do that!"

"Oh! Before you go!" Kaito quickly interjects. "Don't bother knocking on Kiibo's or Ouma's doors. Ouma's sick and Kiibo is looking after him. Until I can figure out what's wrong with Ouma then I think it's safer if we all stay away from him."

"Oh, but that sounds so lonely..." A crease grows between Gonta's brows. "Gonta supposes it good thing he has Kiibo then. Gonta doesn't think Kiibo capable of getting sick." The entomologist cocks his head to the side. "Gonta heard that machines can't get sick but they can get viruses. Is that, um, the robot equivalent of getting ill?"

Kaito suppresses a snort once he realises that Gonta is being genuine and not actually telling a joke. He clears his throat, coughing lightly into a fist. "I suppose you can say that."

"Well Gonta hope Kiibo not catch what Ouma have then," Gonta says. He looks surprisingly upset. "Gonta can't help but feel bad. Now is the worst time to get sick. Gonta want to be true gentleman so he would never hurt anyone but...what if someone ends up being tricked by Shirogane? If Ouma sick then he can't defend himself!"

"He's got Kiibo to look after him, remember?" Kaito reminds him.

"But Kiibo tell Gonta yesterday that he not very strong, only has strength of an average senior citizen," Gonta responds. "That makes Kiibo not very strong."

"Eh? Really?" Kaito blinks before shaking his head. He has to focus! "Listen man, I don't think you need to worry about that sort of stuff. I'm going to make sure that nothing bad happens whilst we're here, okay? Your worries are my worries and if I'm not worried about anything bad happening then that means you don't have to worry either!"

"Momota capable of taking worries away just like that?" Gonta's mouth goes wide with awe. "Woah, that's incredible! Momota must be a very good gentleman to be able to do that!"

"Hah, well, I wouldn't exactly call myself a gentleman," Kaito says. His grandparents had always told him growing up that he's a very well behaved young man but...being called a gentleman sounds too formal. Kaito doesn't do formal; he does wild and adventurous! "But you're right about me being able to make worries disappear in a blink of an eye!"

If people have time to worry then that means they're not focusing properly. Kaito would rather have someone delegate their worries so they don't have to deal with them alone. He knows how strong he is, both physically and mentally. If someone is struggling then he'd rather deal with their problems for them head on instead of them suffering in silence. People can't reach their full potential if they let fear hold them back!

"Wow, that's a relief!" Gonta wipes his forehead. "Gonta worried things would go really bad today but if Momota can make worries go away just like that then Gonta really has nothing to worry about!"

"You're worried?" Kaito asks.

"Ah, well..." Gonta sighs and crosses his arms with a grimace. "Gonta just got really horrible feeling yesterday after what both Harukawa and Shirogane told us. We're all here because we all died before, right? Gonta's chest hurts when he thinks about it too hard. Gonta hate idea that he might've killed someone before. Gentleman don't kill!"

Gonta suddenly looks distressed and his hands ball up into tight fists. Kaito furrows his brows.

“Hey, hey, hey, you don’t have to worry about that sort of crap, man. I mean, I’ve only known you for a day and I know you won’t even hurt a fly! You’re the last person I’d expect to have killed someone!”

“...Gonta just wonder why he’s here then,” Gonta admits quietly. “Gonta big and strong, he knows he would be hard to kill. More likely Gonta kill someone than someone kill Gonta.”

“Hey, c’mon...” Kaito grins at him reassuringly. “If I say that you’re innocent then that means you’re innocent, got it? Since you’re worrying so much that means you’re not doing enough! How about you gather everyone whilst I dry myself, okay?”

Gonta nods with an uneasy smile. “Momota, right. Gonta not doing enough!”

“I didn’t mean it like *that*-”

“Gonta go wake up everyone now!” Gonta declares before his eyes go wide. “Oh! But before Gonta go, Gonta want to thank Momota for reassuring him! Momota really easy to talk to! Makes Gonta glad that he’s here.”

Gonta dashes off before Kaito can say anything else. It seems like Gonta is the type of person who is eager to please people...or he’s just very gullible. Hmm, hopefully that won’t become a problem. Gonta has made it very clear that he hates even the idea of killing someone. Kaito just hopes that hatred is enough to keep Gonta alive.

“You know, you shouldn’t tell Gonta things like that.” Maki pops up next to his door and Kaito barely suppresses a surprised jump.

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“Telling him that he’s innocent,” Maki says. She chews her lip. “I mean, it’s not like...you’re wrong. Gonta is innocent. But...you can’t exactly go around telling that to everyone who starts to worry, you know?”

“Well of course I know that but...” Kaito fumbles with the towel around his shoulders to distract himself. “He was worried and I just wanted to reassure him. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

Maki lets out a quiet huff of air. “...just think before you speak, okay?” She watches as Gonta knocks on Tenko’s door. The aikido master doesn’t look too happy about being woken up so early. “Or else you’re going to back yourself into a corner. Not everyone here is entirely innocent, you know?”

Of course he knows that but it’s very hard to condemn someone if you can’t even remember what they’ve done. “Not everyone here is guilty either, even the people who have killed before. The situation we’re in...it’s unique.”

“...right.” Maki casts her eyes to the floor wordlessly. An awkward silence starts to grow.

Kaito watches Gonta knock on Korekiyo’s door from the corner of his eye. He can hear Angie and Tenko talking to each other by the artist’s bedroom door. He is somewhat surprised as he realises Kirumi isn’t anywhere to be seen. Did he miss Gonta knocking on her door?

“You should get ready,” Maki suddenly says before gesturing to his wet hair. “You’ll catch a cold if you don’t dry yourself properly.”

It’s strange. One minute Maki acts scary and brutally blunt yet the next she’s sweet and caring.

She's clearly the sort of person who just likes to crack on and do things, especially at her own pace. Kaito just wishes she would slow down a little and take a deep breath.

It turns out Kirumi was merely doing some organising in her lab, going through all of her different cleaning products. When Kaito tells her he's going to have a meeting with everyone outside, she ends up going to the dining room and returns with a tray containing a large jug of icy water and several glass cups.

The small amount of people gathered under the gazebo shocks him for a moment. There's only seven of them outside and that's including Kaito. He supposes the group is so small since Kokichi and Kiibo are unavailable and he's *not* counting Tsumugi but still, it almost depresses him when only six faces turn to look up at him expectantly.

"Um, why did Momota have Gonta wake us up so early? Angie was having a wonderful sleep!" Angie complains as she watches a droplet of water run down the side of the jug.

"I wasn't aware we were going to have group meetings," Korekiyo adds.

"I just wanted to do some sort of roll call," Kaito admits. "You know..."

"To make sure no one died during the night?" Tenko asks. "But Harukawa guarded the dormitory last night, right? Couldn't you have just asked her about our wellbeing?"

"I personally think it's for the best if we regularly meet up like this," Kirumi intervenes. "So we can frequently keep tabs on one another. If we all agree to have meetings like this, it will deter someone from turning to murder since they'll have a significantly reduced timeframe to work with."

"Oh! Gonta gets it!" Gonta nods along happily. "Gonta thinks meetings are good idea! Nice to see everyone too!"

"Where are Ouma and Kiibo?" Korekiyo asks. "Shouldn't they be here if you want everyone at each meeting?"

"Yeah, uh, about that," Kaito says. He rubs the tip of his nose. "It looks like Shirogane's motive has started to get more intense. I think Ouma caught the disease she'd mentioned yesterday. Since I don't want anyone catching what he has, he's going to stay away from us all for the time being. Kiibo's keeping an eye on him though so there's no need to worry about him."

"Ouma's sick?" Kirumi's face crumples with concern. "Does he need anything?"

"Didn't Momota make it clear that Kiibo should be the only person looking after him?" Maki interjects impatiently. "You'd just be putting yourself in needless danger if you start going in and out of Ouma's room for no reason. We don't know how infectious he is and it would be a hindrance if more people get sick."

Kirumi raises an eyebrow at Maki's blunt response before clearing her throat. "Oh...I see. My apologies, I was only trying to help."

Maki scoffs as she jerks her head to the side and starts to drum her fingers against the wooden picnic table.

Kaito clears his throat and quickly diverts everyone's attention back to himself. "So from the looks

of it, it looks like a couple of Shirogane's motives have come into play. She started the time limit yesterday so, ah, *yeah*, we've only got *two* days to work with now-"

"*Two?!*" Tenko's eyebrows get hidden by her bangs as they both leap up incredulously. "Ghk, and here Tenko was hoping that she'd let us have yesterday as a freebie."

"Don't be so naïve," Maki chastises her.

"Harukawa," Kaito grumbles warningly. Maki thankfully seems to get the message and huffs, burying the bottom of her face into her palm as she turns her head even further away. He gets that she's stressed but that doesn't mean she has to be so rude to everyone else.

Tenko uncomfortably starts to fiddle with the sleeves of her shirt. "Tenko wasn't trying to be naïve. She's just surprised, that's all."

"All of the food in the kitchen has been removed," Kirumi states, moving the conversation along. "On top of that, Ouma is sick with Shirogane's unknown disease. That's three motives already in play."

Gonta rubs his chin. "Um, so that leaves us with the, ah, videos, secrets..."

"Money," Angie adds.

"Didn't one of the Monokubs tell us they'd reveal how we all ended up here?" Korekiyo asks.

"I've already said how you all ended up in the simulation," Maki says. "You all joined willingly, you just don't remember."

"It seems Tenko doesn't remember a lot," Tenko mumbles with a frown. "Tch...why would Tenko willingly join a killing game? Tenko hates not being able to remember."

"Harukawa, do you care to enlighten us, perhaps?" Korekiyo suggests. "After all, you clearly know a lot more than you're letting on."

Maki bristles. "Even if I do know more, sometimes it's better to remain ignorant." She pauses before letting out a quiet sigh. "Although if you all truly do want to know more, I'd rather wait until someone else can tell you all."

"Eh? So you're just going to keep us in the dark?" Angie pouts. "That's so not cool."

Maki narrows her eyes in irritation and to Kaito's decreasing surprise, she chooses to not respond. Hmm. There must be a reason why she's avoiding talking about certain subjects. It's just, fuck, something doesn't feel right about the way she refuses to talk about the world outside of the game.

"Someone else?" Kirumi raises an eyebrow. "Like a different survivor?"

"Yes, a different survivor," Maki answers curtly.

"Guys, we're getting off track!" Kaito claps his hands together. "Focus!"

"What are we even discussing though? I'm well aware that Shirogane has several motives lined up for us," Korekiyo says. "And I'm not stupid enough to let myself be allured by them."

Kaito purses his lips at Korekiyo's terse words. "I get that, man. It's just, well, we're all in this together, yeah? It'll be easier if we face Shirogane's motives together, not individually. If we're all going to get through this then we need to start working as a team-"

“And what if I don’t want to be a part of a team?” Korekiyo asks. “Whilst I would love to observe how you all react during these next two days, I don’t really plan to form any relationships with anyone. I’d rather just wait for the exit to be fixed and then just leave.”

Ouch. “Dude, I’m not asking you to be friends with everyone! I’m asking you to cooperate. Gotta make sure that we’re all on the same page and that we all trust each other enough to not turn on one another.”

Tenko looks scandalised. “Are you implying Tenko is going to kill someone? Because Tenko would never hurt anyone and she’ll send anyone into orbit who thinks otherwise!”

Isn’t that the same as hurting someone?! Oh well, at least she’s steering clear of murder at least. “That’s not what I’m implying! I’m just...” He pounds his fists together encouragingly. “I’m just making you all aware that from now on, all of your worries are now my worries! Since I’m confident that we can all work together then that means you should all feel the same way too!”

“Momota really good at taking worries away,” Gonta loudly whispers to Angie, who is sitting next to him.

“Is that so?” Angie’s eyes hold a curious glint in them. “So is Momota going to take responsibility of everyone here?” She leans forward, her face darkening whilst a crooked smile stretches across her lips. “Is Momota vowing to keep us all safe from Shirogane? Because that is a very big promise and if Momota is simply lying then Angie will curse his family for one hundred generations.”

“O-One hundred?” Shit, that’s like... *a lot* of people.

“I will also be aiding Momota to keep you all safe,” Kirumi says, positioning herself by Kaito’s side, her hands clasped down by her waist. “If you all need anything, I urge you all to come to me. I am up to any task within reason.”

Korekiyo hums. “Any task?”

“There’s no need to sound so creepy,” Tenko hisses before dramatically scooting further down the bench. “Typical male behaviour consists of making freaky remarks like that. Tenko will definitely be keeping an eye on you from now on so you don’t harass any of the girls!”

“Is that so?” Korekiyo drawls out slowly.

“Guys!” What’s it with everyone suddenly changing topics all the time? It’s like no one can concentrate for more than five seconds! “Pointless arguing is the last thing we need!”

“Well Tenko doesn’t like...like his vibes!” Tenko jabs a finger towards Korekiyo, who looks incredibly unbothered by her words. If anything, he looks almost amused. “He creeps Tenko out!”

“And Angie doesn’t like how Momota is trying to boss us all around,” Angie says. “The only person Angie listens to is her God and he’s telling her that...that she needs to put herself first before anyone else. Angie has an entire island of people to get back to, you know? They’ll all curse you all for a thousand generations if anything happens to Angie!”

A thousand?! Now she’s just increasing the cursing period!

“If you want to put yourself first then that is completely fine,” Kirumi intervenes. “What Momota and I simply ask of you all is to think rationally and not do anything that will cause problems for everyone here.” She holds up a finger. “Whilst working as a group is the most logical thing for us all to do, no one is going to force anyone to do anything. I simply ask that you all turn up to each

roll call we do. What you all do with your free time after that is none of my business.”

Blunt and straight to the point. Kaito clears his throat awkwardly as everyone accepts Kirumi’s request. Personally, he would’ve added a little more oomph to his speech but he supposes Kirumi got her point across.

...he kind of wishes everyone would take him a little more seriously.

“I would also like to add that if anyone notices any suspicious activity then they should alert either myself or Momota as soon as they can,” Kirumi says. “Other than that, there isn’t much else to discuss. Just please keep yourselves safe and if you need any further help, I am always here.”

“Yep! What my sidekick said!” Kaito grins.

As everyone disperses, Kaito hangs back and quietly looks up at the wisteria. He doesn’t get it, why does it feel like everyone wants to work *against* him instead of with him? He’s just trying to keep morale up!

“Momota?”

Kirumi patiently situates herself in front of him so that Kaito has no choice but to acknowledge her. “Oh, hey sidekick! You good?”

“Actually, I’m concerned about you,” Kirumi admits. “You’re frowning. Is there something wrong?”

“Something wrong? With *me*?!” Kaito laughs loudly. “Of course not!”

Kirumi looks like she doesn’t believe him. “Momota, it became increasingly more obvious that no one was listening to you properly during roll call-”

“That’s not my fault!” Kaito quickly interjects. “It’s just every time I said something, someone would always-”

“Momota, how would you feel if someone frequently rounded you up with a group of strangers and implied that they don’t think you’re strong willed enough to cooperate with one another?” Kirumi suddenly asks.

“Eh?”

“I understand that you have good intentions but I believe you’re taking the wrong approach when talking to everyone,” Kirumi says. Her expression turns apologetic as Kaito gawks at her. “We’re all young adults and I think everyone feels insulted that you don’t trust them enough to-”

“Hey, hey, hey! Of course I trust everyone!” Kaito argues. He pulls a face. “I’m just making sure everyone trusts each other-”

“You can’t force everyone to trust each other, especially in a situation like this. Trust has to be earned, not expected,” Kirumi responds. “I can tell you have good intentions but I think you need to try and unite the group in a different way. Your speeches are...”

Kaito grimaces as Kirumi hesitates. “Are what?”

“My apologies if I offend you but your speeches remind me of what a superhero would say in a children’s cartoon,” Kirumi tells him. “You’re dealing with real people, Momota. They don’t need

reminding that they're in a group and need to work together. If anything, they're more likely looking for someone who can tell them *how* to work together."

"How to work together..." Kaito mumbles as he strokes his chin.

"I agree that trusting one another is important and keeping morale up is essential but I think you need to find a different approach, something that suits everyone. The next two days are going to be frightening, whether or not people will admit that out loud." Kirumi smiles softly at him. "I do think you're up to the task of keeping everyone happy, however. Your positivity is infectious and as the time limit nears its end, it's vital everyone has someone to turn to for support. I simply urge you find a way to make yourself seem more dependable."

More...dependable? Her words feel like a blow to his gut. His smile feels elastic as it suddenly tightens. Kirumi must notice that his smile has turned fake since she sighs softly and places a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"I'm not trying to criticise you. I simply want you to be the best leader you're capable of being," Kirumi reassures him. "You already have the right intentions, Momota. You just...need to look at things from a different angle. Put yourself into someone else's shoes."

"...right," Kaito mumbles before biting down on his tongue.

"Oh...I truly am sorry, Momota. I really didn't mean to offend you," Kirumi quickly says as she notices Kaito's expression dim.

He's not frustrated at *her*. He's more frustrated with himself for not realising his flaws sooner. Kaito, well, isn't used to people helping him. He's used to it being the other way around. The fact that it's his *sidekick* who is pointing out his mistakes...it's rather *embarrassing*. He doesn't want Kirumi to think he's a failure because he's *not*! He's the Luminary of the Stars!

Kaito is the Luminary of the Stars and he hates that he's tainting his title by being such a failure.

"Hah! As if you could offend me!" Kaito dismissively responds with a blinding grin. "I was just taking in what you said!" He *definitely* wasn't throwing a silent pity party for himself. "You made a couple good points but I can assure you I know what I'm doing!"

"I...I see," Kirumi says. Her expression is delicately blank, as if she's purposely trying to keep her face neutral. "So long as I haven't offended you..."

"Hey, I just said you didn't offend me, didn't I?" Kaito reassures her. Heroes don't show weakness. They can handle criticism! (Heroes don't deal with criticism in the first place because they're naturally perfect. This is just a blip!) He chuckles boisterously. "Don't look so worried, sidekick!"

Because if Kirumi is worried about him then Kaito will have to worry about himself because her worries are his own and Kaito doesn't have time to worry about himself. Can't she see that he's fine?

"Anyway, I should get going," Kaito says before Kirumi can say anything else. "I need to hunt down Shirogane so I can get some answers from her!"

"Do you want me to come with you?"

"N-No! I'll be fine on my own!" Kaito insists and dashes off, ignoring the heavy build up of shame that settles at the bottom of his stomach.

Kaito doesn't find Tsumugi but he does find someone he doesn't recognise in the basement. There's a girl with dusty pink hair inside of the games room, playing on what looks to be a recently installed arcade machine.

Huh? Who is this?! Has she been here all this time?

The girl's backpack is by her feet as she focuses on the machine in front of her, her tongue poking out of her mouth as she concentrates. Her eyes, which are a similar shade of pink to her hair, stare intensely at the screen. She doesn't even acknowledge Kaito as he steps further into the room.

There are a couple of out of place marks on the floor, which Kaito thinks the Exisals must've made. He briefly wonders where they are. They must've been down here at some point.

"Hey! Have you been down here all this time?"

"One second please."

The girl basically ignores him as she continues to rapidly press down on a button, going through what looks to be a character selection menu. Each time she presses down on a character, a loud buzzing noise plays. It seems she's locked out of the game for whatever reason. She gives up eventually and turns to Kaito with a pout.

"Whoops, my bad. Did I distract you from something?" Kaito asks as the girl continues to puff her cheeks out.

"It's fine," she sighs before looking up at Kaito lazily, rubbing one of her eyes. She yawns loudly. "Have you come down to play some games too? When I heard that a new arcade game got installed I came as soon as I could."

"Uh..." Kaito offers her a confused smile. "Sorry but...*who* are you? You weren't here yesterday."

"I'm Chiaki Nanami," Chiaki answers with a soft smile. "You're Kaito Momota...I think."

"Y-Yeah, that's me!" Kaito awkwardly tries to figure out where to look. Whilst Chiaki seems laid back, he doesn't want to scare her by staring at her too much. "Wait, how do you know who I am?"

"That's not important," Chiaki tells him before gesturing towards the arcade machine. "I think I've been locked out but I really want to play. Hey, maybe you could play something for me instead? I saw your picture on the character selection menu...I think."

"My picture?" Kaito raises an eyebrow as he heads toward the machine. He narrows his eyes as he spots a grainy looking picture of himself. Huh. She's right, for some reason he's a character to play as in this game. "What the..."

He clicks down on it and to his surprise, he's taken to another menu with three options. There are three buttons to choose from. Case One. Case Two. Case Three.

"It let you in?" Chiaki asks before pouting. "It didn't let me in."

"Maybe only I can play as myself?" Kaito suggests before blanching. Hold on just a second, wasn't one of Tsumugi's motives an arcade machine?! He abruptly takes a step back, grabbing Chiaki's shoulders as he does so and drags her away from the machine.

“Momota?”

“I don’t think either of us should play on this,” Kaito tells her, cursing himself for even giving the machine any attention in the first place. “Look, I’m not sure if you know what’s going on but-”

“You’re in a killing game, right?” Chiaki looks up at him expectantly.

“How do you know...” Kaito narrows his eyes. Just who the hell is this girl? He drops his hands from her shoulders and pulls away from her as if she’s suddenly turned as hot as the sun. “Are you a part of Shirogane’s motive or something?”

There’s something about her that he doesn’t like. Whilst she seems placid, there’s this...look in her eyes that puts him on edge. When he looks closely, he swears he can see a faint V and a 3 in her eyes.

“...hey hey, maybe we should focus on the arcade machine?” Chiaki suggests. She picks up her backpack and slips it over her shoulders. “I want to see what sort of game it is and since I can’t play, I’d like it if you could play for me instead.”

“Nuh uh, no can do,” Kaito tells her. “Look, literally *just* yesterday I was told that an arcade machine was going to be installed as a part of one big motive and now there’s suddenly a brand new one in the games room. I ain’t going anywhere near it.”

“But...shouldn’t you investigate it to see that it’s safe?” Chiaki asks. “Or what if there’s important information on it? It’s probably for the best if you just take a tiny look at it...maybe.”

She seems awfully obsessed with the arcade machine. Shouldn’t she be more concerned about, you know, literally anything else? Does Chiaki even know what’s going on? And what’s with her eyes? It should be impossible for there to be a letter and a number literally on her eyeballs, unless she’s wearing contacts.

“Like I said, no can do,” Kaito responds. “The arcade machine is a trap, Nanami. It’s not safe to play on it.” He tries to steer her away from the room. “Hey, how about we go somewhere else instead? I can introduce you to everyone and catch you up with what’s happening.”

As he tries to march her out of the room, she digs her feet into the ground, causing Kaito to stumble. He flails, his hand slipping from her shoulder as he tries to grab something to balance himself. He ends up grabbing her hair to his horror and just as he is about to yell out an apology, he finds himself pulling her hair from her head a little too easily. His horror turns to bewilderment as Chiaki, no, *Tsumugi* turns to look at him with a scowl.

“Hey! Careful with my Chiaki Nanami wig!” Tsumugi snatches the pink wig from Kaito’s hand, holding it carefully to her chest. Her free hand tugs a hair net from her head and Kaito watches as her blue curls are freed.

“Shirogane?!” Kaito wants to be angry but he finds that he’s far too confused to start yelling at her. “What the hell? Why were you dressed up as some random girl?”

“Because,” Tsumugi whines pitifully, “I thought it would be fun to dress as Nanami and try and lure you into playing on the arcade machine!” She clicks her fingers. “Tch, I really thought I was going to trick you too. I know you have a soft spot for cute girls...”

“N-No I don’t!” Kaito glares at her. Okay, now he’s starting to feel angry. “Shut up! There’s more important crap we should be talking about other than your stupid wigs-”

“My wigs aren’t stupid!” Tsumugi strokes her pink wig carefully, as if it was a cat. “They’re an essential part of my cosplay-”

“Shirogane, I literally don’t care,” Kaito says. “I’m more concerned about what you’ve done with Ouma. He’s really fucking sick, you know? What the hell is wrong with-”

“He’s got Despair Disease,” Tsumugi tells him proudly, putting her hands on her hips. “And before you ask, Despair Disease is basically just like a super bad flu that can only be cured if a murder happens so-”

“Quit screwing around!” Kaito slams one of his fists hard against the arcade machine.

“Hey, you’re going to break it if you’re not careful!” Tsumugi scolds him, slapping his hand away.

Kaito rolls his eyes. “And? It’s just another one of your stupid fucking motives-”

“It’s not stupid! It’s Twilight Syndrome Murder Case...V3!” Tsumugi announces. Kaito can’t help but feel like she added on the V3 at the end impulsively.

“What sort of name is *that*?!”

“It’s a *reference*!” Tsumugi tells him heatedly. “Anyway-”

“I don’t care about your shitty arcade machine,” Kaito bulldozes over her. He hits it again just because can and Tsumugi lets out a scandalised gasp. “I want to know more about what Despair Disease is! There must be another way to cure Ouma-”

“Yeah, by showing me a dead body. Once someone has died, I’ll cure him-”

“So you *can* cure him without a murder happening!” Kaito runs an exasperated hand down his face. “Shirogane, I’m gonna be fucking honest with you, I don’t have the patience to deal with your bullshit so just cure him now before I-”

“Before you what? Kill me?” Tsumugi teases. “I mean, go ahead if you really want to-”

“*No!*” Kaito shoves her away harshly as she leans forward a little too invitingly. “What the *fuck*, Shirogane?!”

“Oh well, don’t say I didn’t try to help,” Tsumugi says. She dusts off her hoodie, pouting as she spots a crease near her shoulders. “And be careful! Do you know how long it took me to make this jacket?”

He doesn’t care. He doesn’t fucking care. “Just fucking cure him before-”

“Yeah but...” Tsumugi fiddles with the strings on her hoodie. “I don’t want to, so...”

Something in him snaps. He pushes her hard against the arcade machine, slamming his hand by her head as she looks up at him challengingly. “What the hell is wrong with you?! Seriously, do you not give a single damn about anyone here?! We’re *people*, Shirogane. Human fucking beings. And you think you can push us around and, and, *force* us to kill each other? For your own sick entertainment?!”

“...I mean, yeah, that’s why you’re all here-”

He hits the machine again, causing it to shake. “If you were even just a *tiny* bit decent then you’d stop all of this. This is, what, the *fourth* game you’ve gotten out of us? And you expect us to

entertain you again?!"

"I only, like, remember the last game properly," Tsumugi admits airily. "And I'm gonna be honest, I didn't like how it ended. I mean, I was forced out of my own game!" She smiles sweetly. "I did warn everyone that I'd come back though. And I *did*! Here I am!"

Kaito frowns, feeling sweat build up on his palms. "What are you-"

"-on about?" Tsumugi giggles. "Oh, you'll find out soon enough. Hey, maybe I'll be generous and tell you all everything right before the time limit ends." Her eyes sparkle. "Aren't you curious about how you died during the last game? About how you..." Her smile turns venomous. "*Failed.*"

He failed? Failed what?

Keep it together, Kaito. She's just trying to get under your skin. Don't let her win, don't let her make you stoop down to her level.

"You know what? Fuck this. Fuck you," he spits, pulling away. "Talking to you is a waste of time."

"Oh? But don't you want to know what's really wrong with Ouma?" Tsumugi asks him. "I didn't tell you what strain he has."

Strain? Ugh, of course Despair Disease has different strains. "Fucking spit it out then."

Tsumugi hums. "But that would be boring. I think I'd rather give you a demonstration instead."

"Hah? What do you-"

"I'll do you a solid and give you a demonstration right now!" Tsumugi tells him. She clasps her hands together, giggling. "Let me just grab something. I'll meet you in Ouma's bedroom, okay?"

She dashes off before he can stop her. It's after she leaves the room he realises he missed his chance to grab and restrain her. Fuck. He needs to get a grip! At least he knows where she's heading. He'll get her once she enters Kokichi's room. He'll make sure of it.

Kaito gives the arcade machine one last irritated punch, sneering at it before he leaves. He's not stupid, he knows that machine is nothing but trouble. He was stupid to even click on his picture in the first place.

He slips on another mask and pair of gloves once he's inside of Kokichi's room. Kiibo peers up at him curiously. He's sitting by Kokichi's bed, one of his hands pressed gently against the smaller male's forehead.

When Kaito raises an eyebrow, Kiibo says, "I can control the temperature of my hands so I can make them as hot or as cold as I like."

"You lied to me about having cool robot functions," Kokichi grumbles. He cracks open an eye and blinks when he spots Kaito. "Oh, what are you doing here, Momota?"

"Waiting for Shirogane," Kaito admits.

"Shirogane?" Kiibo starts to frown. "Why? She's not up to something, is she? If a fight breaks out then I don't think I'll be much help since-"

“You’re not that strong. Yeah, Gonta told me all about your strength,” Kaito says.

Kiibo bristles. “Don’t make it sound like I’m incredibly weak!”

“Kiiboy, *you* basically implied that you’re weak,” Kokichi mumbles. His eyebrows draw together in dissatisfaction. “Can you make your hand any cooler?”

“It would be dangerous if I make it any colder,” Kiibo tells him apologetically.

Kokichi sighs. “Lame.”

As Kiibo splutters, Kaito tenses up as the bedroom door creaks open. He feels his hands tighten into fists as Tsumugi slips into the room. He notices that she’s changed back into her regular uniform. She waves at everyone as if she’s greeting a group of friends. “Hi everyone!”

“Um...” Kiibo awkwardly looks at her. “What do you want?”

“I’ve come to very helpfully fill you all in with what’s wrong with Ouma,” Tsumugi answers. She traipses towards the bed, dodging Kaito with a chuckle when he lunges for her. “Sheesh, at least buy me dinner first.”

“Where the hell do you think you’re going?” Kaito asks, prowling after her. “You said you’d tell me what strain he has. You can do that standing next to the door.”

“Strain?” Kiibo echoes.

“Ouma has Despair Disease,” Tsumugi says before turning to Kokichi with a smile. “And guess which strain you have! Guess!”

“...I don’t think I understand,” Kokichi tells her.

“Oh, don’t worry too much,” Tsumugi reassures him before clapping her hands together. “So, drum roll please!”

“But there’s no drums to play,” Kiibo points out.

Tsumugi blatantly ignores him, spreading her arms out excitedly as she says, “so, Ouma, the type of Despair Disease you have is...the Trusting Disease! Tell me, do you think you’ve had, I don’t know, any chance in personality?”

“Yeah, I think so,” Kokichi answers. His eyes go wide and Kaito is reminded of how embarrassed Kokichi had been this morning when he started talking without pause. He spots Kokichi reaching for his scarf again. “And I don’t like it one bit. It’s actually kind of *weird* because I *like* being in control but it’s like once I start talking, I can’t stop. Is this what people who trust each other do? Talk about how they’re feeling all the time?” He desperately fumbles with his scarf the entire time, his hands too shaky to grab it properly. Kaito frowns as Kokichi’s cheeks go red for reasons unrelated to his illness.

“Aw, how *cute*,” Tsumugi coos. She snatches his scarf from his neck and cruelly holds it out of reach. When Kiibo tries to grab it, she throws it across the room.

Kaito scowls as he picks it up himself. “Hey! Don’t be such a cow.”

“Anyway.” Tsumugi reaches into her pocket. “Since you’re so trustful now, does that mean you trust me?”

“Yes,” Kokichi answers before biting down hard on his knuckle.

“Don’t *do* that!” Kaito passes him his scarf quickly.

Before Kokichi can shove his scarf into his mouth instead, Tsumugi hums playfully as she pulls something out of her pocket. It’s a small bottle. Her hand is covering the label and Kaito can’t help but think she is on purpose.

She winks at him and Kaito growls as Tsumugi turns her attention back to Kokichi. “Hey Ouma, guess what I’ve got?”

Kaito hears Kokichi let out a very muffled, “*what?*”

She moves her hand, revealing the label on the bottle. Strike-9 Poison. Kaito almost chokes on his next breath as Tsumugi dangles the bottle in front of Kokichi, who has suddenly turned very pale. “Guess what? You won’t actually die if you drink this, you know? Go on, try it. You can trust me.”

Tsumugi presses the bottle into Kokichi’s shaking hands and Kaito swears he almost has a damn heart attack when Kokichi *actually* tries to open the bottle, as if by instinct.

“*Don’t!*” Kiibo snatches the bottle away from him and Kokichi freezes, staring down at his own hands as if he can’t believe he just tried to drink poison.

Tsumugi starts to cackle wildly, wiping away tears. “Y-You actually believed me! You gullible *idiot!* If you drink that then you would been dead in minutes!”

“I know,” Kokichi says numbly. His bottom lip starts to wobble and his eyes go vacant, as if he’s gone somewhere else entirely. “*I know.*”

“Alright, *that’s it!*” Kaito lunges and snatches Tsumugi’s arms, keeping them trapped using his own. She whines pitifully but she’s no match against Kaito, especially since he’s being fuelled by pure rage. “Get the fuck out of here!”

He should’ve grabbed her the second she walked in. Why the fuck did he wait until now? God, why does he keep fucking up so badly? Tsumugi complains the entire time as he shoves her, fighting against him every step of the way. She kicks every cardboard box she sees, causing paper to fly everywhere.

“Don’t be so boring, Momota!” Tsumugi whines. She knocks over another box. “What’s your problem-”

“What the hell is going on in here?”

Maki stands in the doorway, a knife in her hand. She assesses the scene in front of her with a frown. Her eyes darken dramatically as they land on Tsumugi.

“*You.*”

“Oh great, *she’s* here,” Tsumugi complains.

“Shut up.” Maki helps Kaito out by grabbing Tsumugi’s other arm. However, Kaito notices that Maki becomes momentarily distracted as a couple of whiteboards catch her eye. She shakes her head and mutters something under her breath before assisting Kaito with dragging Tsumugi from the room.

Before Kaito closes the door, he spares one last glance at Kokichi and Kiibo. Kokichi is frantically talking to Kiibo about something whilst the robot rubs his back. As much as he wants to stay and help, getting Tsumugi restrained has quickly become his number one priority. He closes the door quietly, silently apologising to both Kokichi and Kiibo for leaving so abruptly.

“I turn my back for one second and you manage to find a way to weasel your way in,” Maki mutters as she hauls the cosplayer towards her room. “And where are the Exisals? Why aren’t they with you?”

“The Monokubs are busy,” Tsumugi responds before kicking her feet against the floor. “Let me go, I actually needed to grab something from Ouma’s room. The videos are in there-”

“Great. Thanks for telling me. I’ll go break them as soon as I can,” Maki says.

“Ugh!” Tsumugi clicks her tongue as they reach her bedroom door. “Don’t *break* them! You’re all supposed to *watch* them-”

“You’re delusional if you think we will just because you want us to,” Maki responds. She reaches into her pocket and pulls out a pair of handcuffs she must’ve grabbed earlier.

Tsumugi sighs loudly. “You’re seriously going to restrain me? At least let me put on my Nagito Komaeda cosplay first-”

“Do you have an off button?” Maki snaps the handcuffs around her wrists and shoves Tsumugi harshly into her room, watching passively as Tsumugi stumbles and lands heavily on her palms and knees. “You’re staying in here until the exit is fixed. Once it is, I’m personally throwing you through it myself, got it?”

“Are you seriously just gonna-”

Maki slams the door closed loudly before sighing. “Well at least that’s her sorted out.”

Kaito lets out a breath he didn’t even know he was holding, slumping forward and using the wall as a crutch. “She’s fucking crazy.”

The assassin hums. “Are you okay? What happened?”

Kaito laughs humourlessly, wiping his forehead as he says, “she’s just...so *frustrating*, you know? She keeps saying cryptic shit and saying fucking awful things just to get a reaction. She was down in the basement dressed as some...some girl wanting me to play on an arcade machine.”

“Arcade machine?” Maki pauses before asking, “do you mean the one Shirogane said was a part of her motive?”

“Yeah, I think so.” He brushes some loose strands of hair from his face. “I didn’t play it, of course. I’m not that dense. I made her tell me what’s wrong with Ouma and she said he has something called Despair Disease? Honestly I’m still confused about what the fuck it is but she ended up telling me to meet in Ouma’s room so she could show some sort of twisted demonstration...”

Maki’s face twists in concern. “What did she do?”

“She, fuck, she thought it would be funny to convince Ouma that drinking some poison wouldn’t kill him,” Kaito says. “Kiibo stopped him thankfully but...what sort of person does that for shits and giggles? You should’ve seen the look on Ouma’s face. He looked *petrified*.”

“But why would Ouma do as Shirogane says? Even he’s not stupid enough to fall for something so obvious,” Maki says.

Kaito groans and runs his hands down his face. “He’s...he’s really sick, Harukawa. He’s not in the right mindset to keep himself safe. I’m just glad I got Kiibo to look after him. At least Kiibo seems trustworthy enough.”

“He is trustworthy,” Maki tells him. “I just don’t want Ouma taking advantage of his kindness. Kiibo is a bit of a people pleaser so he tends to go over the top when helping people.”

“Ouma’s too sick to take advantage of him,” Kaito reassures her. “But I doubt he would in the first place.”

“Well you clearly don’t know him that well then,” Maki responds. “Ouma can be a nightmare when he wants to be. On purpose too.”

Kaito sighs. He doesn’t want to do this right now. He doesn’t want to disagree with Maki. After the morning he’s had, he just wants everyone to chill out and be positive for a change. When he doesn’t say anything, Maki looks away quietly.

“Sorry,” she mutters softly.

“Huh, what for?”

“For making you uncomfortable,” Maki says. She swallows. “I didn’t mean to.”

“I know,” Kaito replies and pretends things aren’t awkward when they both become silent.

Final Loop - Chapter 1 Part 4

Chapter Notes

Ahhhhhh! Thank you so much for the 800+ kudos!!! I am absolutely thrilled to see that so many people are enjoying my writing!

Sorry for the later update! I wanted to take my time with this chapter :) Sorry in advance if there are any mistakes :,)

Thank you to everyone who left a comment on the previous chapter! Also, thank you to everyone who has given this fic a kudo too! It really does mean a lot!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

“Is something wrong? Momota look sad.”

Kaito jolts as he snaps back into reality, his ears burning as he realises that he must’ve zoned out. After talking to Maki, they had both gone their separate ways. Kaito, not wanting to waste time moping around in the dormitory, decided to roam around the school.

He’s not sure when he ended up in the basement, specifically inside of the games room. Perhaps he just subconsciously wanted to keep an eye on the brand new arcade machine. He *did* try to turn it off earlier but when he reached for the power cord, one of the Monokubs appeared quite literally out of thin air and told him to back off. Tch. *Whatever*. He doubts anyone is going to play on it anyway.

Kaito doesn’t remember sitting down heavily on the floor directly across from the arcade machine. He just remembers feeling...fed up. Put off. Even though the conversation he had with Maki wasn’t an actual argument, he still feels like he wished things played out differently. It’s strange knowing that there’s so much he doesn’t remember, that there’s a huge gap in his memory that he’s probably never going to remember again.

Maki remembers everything. The first game. The second game. The third game. Well, even though she only played one game, she still had to witness the other two. She’s had more than enough time to figure everyone out, to decide who she likes and who she dislikes. Maki likes him, obviously. And that makes Kaito happy! It really does! What doesn’t make him happy is that it seems he’s the *only* person she actually likes. She seems to only tolerate everyone else.

And then there’s Kokichi, who she without a doubt despises.

See, whilst Kaito is grateful that he doesn’t have to remember the horrors of the previous killing games, it frustrates him that he doesn’t know why Maki hates the smaller purple haired male so much. Sure, Kokichi *is* dramatic and likes to mess around but he’s also just a person who is trapped in a shitty situation, the exact same situation Kaito is trapped in too. Maki thinks he’s some sort of threat but Kaito...fuck, he doesn’t know.

Maki hating Kokichi also doesn’t seem to be the only negative relationship around here either. Tenko clearly loathes Korekiyo, she’s made that clear every single time the group has met up. Then

again, Korekiyo does give off some ominous vibes that even Kaito thinks are weird. How the hell can someone be so calm about being trapped in such a hellish situation?

Angie also seems to distrust quite a few people. Even though she likes to wear a smile, her eyes always seem wary, like she's constantly searching for a threat. She seems to trust Gonta unconditionally though, which is nice to see but is also peculiar since it's not like the two of them know each other, right? Oh well, it's not like Gonta has any issues with Angie constantly clinging onto his arm.

In fact, she's with him even now. Gonta is currently standing in front of Kaito with a worried look on his face, the concern in his eyes evident even behind his glasses. Angie stands next to him with her typical smile, her hands clasped behind her back.

"Me? I'm fine!" Kaito insists with an uneasy laugh. He dusts his trousers off as he pulls himself up from the floor.

Angie looks rather amused and the bracelet around her wrist starts to rattle as she rocks from side to side. "Is that so? But Kaito was wearing such a deep frown on his face! Perhaps he's realised that there's no happy ending for the situation he's in." Angie smiles brightly. "If Kaito starts praying now though then Angie is confident that her God will welcome him with open arms!"

"I don't...believe in all that," Kaito mumbles, feeling a little uncomfortable.

"Angie shouldn't be so unpositive either!" Gonta looks taken aback by Angie's words. "Harukawa told us that Shirogane locked in room so she no longer threat now! Gonta also pretty sure he can fight Monokubs if needed! Not Exisals though." Gonta crosses his arms with a slight frown. "No, Gonta don't think he can take on an Exisal."

"We'll be out of here before we even have to worry about the Exisals," Kaito tells him. Gonta's face brightens. "So--"

"Is Kaito the sort of person who thinks if he says something will happen enough times then something will actually happen?" Angie ponders out loud.

Angie, Kaito decides, is *very* confusing. She smiles a lot, kind of like Kokichi. Angie, however, is not very good at hiding the emotions trapped in her eyes. There's something about the way she deflects everything that pisses him off. She's carefree in all the wrong ways. If she has something to say then she should just spit it out instead of dancing around certain topics.

"Maybe I am," Kaito says. "Someone has to keep morale up!"

"But Angie doesn't need cheering up," Angie responds. She hugs herself tightly with a warm smile on her face. "Angie has her God on her side so she knows that she doesn't have to worry. In fact, her God is telling her the only person who needs to relax the most around here is *you*, Kaito."

Kaito blanches. "What's *that* supposed to mean?!"

"It means..." Angie hums, pursing her lips as she looks up at the ceiling. "Kaito should like...chill out a little and stop telling everyone what to do. Like, Angie gets that Kaito is only trying to help but the only person Angie listens to is her God so..."

...trying to get her to listen to me is futile then. Is Angie going to be a problem if she's going to refuse to listen to anyone here? I mean, I suppose her doing her own thing is going to be more annoying than dangerous but still, fuck, someone like Angie would never make it far as an astronaut. I don't think she even knows what teamwork is.

“Angie...” Gonta sounds rather disapproving as he crosses his arms. “Momota only trying to help us. Maybe Angie should try to at least listen to him a little? Gonta understand that Angie has her own God she listens to but can’t Angie also listen to Momota too?”

Kaito’s lips quirk upwards into a small smile. Man, he really does owe Gonta. At least he tries to hear everyone out.

“Hmm...” Angie taps her chin as she hums childishly.

See, this is the part where Kaito would roll his eyes and tell her to stop being so immature. However, Kirumi’s previous words make themselves obnoxiously known at the front of his mind. He pauses and nibbles a dry patch of skin on his bottom lip. Kirumi mentioned something about him putting himself into someone else’s shoes, right? Okay, so how about he tries to figure out how Angie is feeling right now?

She’s probably feeling...fed up, right? Because she’s already told him that she has her God to listen to. The fact that she thinks he needs to chill out means...she wants him to back off, yeah? Does that mean Angie doesn’t want his help? But...nah, that can’t be right. Angie clearly wants *some* sort of help since she’s always constantly clinging onto Gonta’s arm. For some reason she trusts Gonta. Is it because of how big he is? His muscles *are* impressive. So does that mean...she wants someone to protect her?

Does she want to feel protected?

...does Angie not feel safe even though Maki is keeping everyone safe from the Exisals and Tsumugi?

But now that he thinks about it...Angie *has* mentioned a few times that she doesn’t exactly like or trust Maki. Is it because she’s an assassin? Kaito...supposes that’s kind of a valid reason to not like someone. If only Angie would give Maki a chance. Maki might come off as cold and scary but she’s a good person deep down, Kaito is confident that she is.

He still needs to figure out how Angie is feeling. He looks down at her. She blinks back up at him curiously, a Cheshire Cat grin plastered on her face. Ah, she’s waiting for him to say something.

Man, Angie sure is *confusing*. Kaito can’t remember a time where he has stopped to think before he speaks. This is, like, so weird. Usually if he has something to say then he’ll just say it. *Ugh*, Kirumi’s words really are affecting him more than he thought they would.

He just wants to be a good leader. A hero who people wish they could be.

(And frustratingly enough, Kirumi made some pretty valid points earlier. It’s just...he doesn’t need someone pointing out his almost non-existent flaws.)

...fuck, why is this so hard?

“Um, Momota? You look really stressed,” Gonta says nervously. “Did Gonta say something wrong?”

Kaito waves a dismissive hand. “Nah, of course you didn’t!”

“Kaito did go really quiet for a moment,” Angie points out cheerfully. “Which is like, super duper weird because Angie thought Kaito didn’t know how to be quiet for more than five seconds!”

Kaito pulls a face and straight away feels the urge to tell her that she’s wrong, that he *totally* knows

how to be quiet for more than five seconds! In fact, he bets he can be quiet for *ten* seconds! However, once again, Kirumi's words come back to haunt him so he doesn't retort to Angie's claim.

Gonta frowns and rubs his chin before his eyes light up. "Oh! Gonta knows what's wrong! Momota dealing with too many worries, isn't he?!"

"Hah?"

"Well you told Gonta this morning that you can take everyone's worries away! Gonta thought Momota amazing for being able to do that but then Gonta realised if Momota has to deal with so many worries along with his own then Momota is going to struggle!" Gonta pumps his fists as an earnest look of enthusiasm grows on his face. "So Gonta thinks Momota should give Gonta back some of his worries! So Momota has less to worry about!"

"Ah, that's..." Kaito chuckles bashfully, a dark red flush crawling up his neck as Angie listens to Gonta's words with a playful grin. "That's not how it works, Gonta."

"Eh?!" Gonta looks taken aback. "But if Momota capable of taking worries away like magic then Gonta should be able to too, right?!"

"If Kaito is capable of magic then he should magic us all away from here!" Angie interjects, clasping her hands together with a joyful smile. "Or, or, Kaito should, like, find a rocket ship and fly us all away!"

"Where am I going to find a rocket just like that?!" Kaito blanches before sighing.

Gonta scratches his head as he looks off to the side. "Gonta doesn't think he's seen any rockets around here so..."

"Eh? But aren't the colourful bears inside rockets?" Angie asks with a pout.

"No, they're inside *Exisals*. Those aren't rockets," Kaito tells her. "Although if I somehow managed to get my hands on one then I'd totally want to take it out for a ride. Those things do look super cool."

"Momota no can go near Exisals!" Gonta pales as he shifts his body so it blocks the exit. "No one can!"

"Woah, woah, *woah!* I wasn't actually being serious!" Kaito raises an eyebrow at the gentle giant's sudden change in demeanour. Gonta looks panicked. There's a sudden shine to his skin that wasn't there before which Kaito quickly identifies as nervous sweat. "Relax, Gonta! It's not like I can go anywhere near them anyway. The Monokubs are very protective of them."

Gonta pauses before swallowing. "Is...Momota telling truth? He not going to go after Exisals?"

Huh. This isn't the first time Gonta has turned nervous when the Exisals have been brought up. Did something happen to him that included an Exisal?

"Angie also thinks that the Exisals are dangerous," Angie agrees. She pulls out a paintbrush before chewing on the end of it with a thoughtful look on her face. "But...if we did manage to get in control of them then that would be a good thing, yes? Angie of course wouldn't trust just anyone to use them but her God is telling her if we ever have the chance to take them then they'd make good protectors."

“Angie...want to use Exisals?” Gonta’s jaw goes slack with surprise. “But...”

“Angie just thinks if she ever had the chance to use an Exisal to her advantage then she’d probably take it,” Angie admits. “Because, like, if Angie’s in control of the Exisals then that means she can’t get hurt by them.”

“Angie not make Gonta use Exisals though, right?” Gonta asks quietly. He’s still drastically pale. “Gonta really, really no like Exisals. Make him feel scared and Gonta have no time to be scared if he want to protect everyone!”

“I think Harukawa is planning to destroy the Exisals the first chance she gets anyway,” Kaito points out. Gonta’s shoulders sag ever so slightly with relief.

Angie, however, looks mildly displeased with Kaito’s claim. “But that would be, like, a really stupid thing to do. What if something bad happens, hmm?” Angie leans forward, her eyes icy and piercing. Kaito swallows. “How are we supposed to protect ourselves if we break the Exisals? They are miraculous creations that are capable of protection if the right person pilots them, correct? Why destroy such wondrous gifts when we can use them to our own advantage?”

“No offence but do you even know how to use an Exisal?” Kaito asks. “I mean, I suppose I’d be able to use one if I had to since I have experience with using machinery. But you? You thought they were rockets literally five minutes ago.”

Angie puffs her cheeks out. “Angie doesn’t have much technology or machinery on her island! It’s not her fault she got a tiny bit confused!”

“I’m just saying,” Kaito sighs. “You do realise how much damage you could cause if you try to use an Exisal without any prior training?”

“Then Kaito can teach Angie how to use an Exisal when one becomes available!” Angie responds joyfully. “So Angie can protect herself!”

This is starting to feel like Angie wanting to be in control rather than her wanting to protect herself. Although...this is the first time she’s willingly asked me for help. If I deny her now then she’s probably going to go back to being awkward.

Angie stares at him expectantly, her hands clasped behind her back as she sways from side to side.

...I have zero intention of actually teaching her how to use an Exisal because I doubt someone as small as Angie is capable of using one anyway. However, if I get Angie on my good side then Kirumi will have no choice but to acknowledge that I’m actually a really good leader! Yeah, I can totally use this to my advantage!

“You know what? Sure!” Kaito slams his fists together, feeling a momentary spike of guilt when Gonta stares at him in bewilderment. “If we ever get the chance to pilot the Exisals then I’ll teach you how to use one!”

...okay, so he’s telling a *tiny* white lie but the chances of her actually getting to use one are incredibly slim. As soon as the exit is secured, everyone is leaving and like hell is anyone coming back here.

Angie claps her hands together. “Oh how divine! Angie was starting to get worried that Kaito was going to end up on Angie’s bad side!”

What the hell is *that* supposed to mean? Kaito fights back the urge to grimace and instead knocks

his knuckles together once again. “Haha, well, I’m actually a super dependable guy!”

“But...” Gonta quietly speaks up, taking a reluctant step forward. “Exisals...really bad. Really dangerous. Maybe Harukawa right, destroying them seems like good idea. If anything bad happens, Gonta can help instead! Gonta just really think that...”

“Does Gonta trust Angie?” Angie suddenly asks.

“Huh?” Gonta blinks before nodding slowly. “Yes, of course Gonta trusts Angie! Gonta trusts all of his friends!”

“Then Gonta has nothing to worry about!” Angie reassures him. She grabs one of his hands and squeezes it with both of her own. “Angie’s God is telling her that she has to do anything she can to keep herself safe. Even though God will welcome her at any time, he thinks Angie doesn’t deserve to die just yet. He’s telling her that...”

Angie goes quiet as her smile dims from overly bright to subdued and almost sad. Gonta tilts his head. “That?”

“He’s sick of Angie coming and going,” Angie says. “Angie’s God is telling her that we’ve all been abandoned yet *again* and it’s up to us to keep ourselves safe. Angie thinks she’ll only truly feel safe if she knows she has the right protection.”

Kaito purses his lips as he says, “well Harukawa-”

“Angie does not trust Harukawa,” Angie retorts instantly, her smile turning rapidly frosty. “She’s an assassin. She might have Kaito wrapped around her finger but Angie knows better than to trust someone who kills people for a living.”

“You can’t just judge someone because of their talent-”

“Harukawa has also made it clear she doesn’t truly care about anyone here,” Angie continues with a sniff. “If Harukawa or anyone else who has left this place really cared about any of us then they would’ve saved us ages ago. No one outside of the simulation is to be trusted.”

“But...” Gonta tilts his head to the side. “Gonta no think that’s right. Harukawa already said everyone too scared to-”

Angie waves a hand dismissively. “Angie doesn’t think someone like Harukawa is capable of feeling scared. She’s lying.”

“No she’s not!” Kaito interjected heatedly. Angie raises an eyebrow playfully, as if she was expecting him to retort. Kaito clears his throat. “She’s not...”

“Angie thinks she is,” Angie presses. “And Angie also thinks everyone who has left us to suffer in this simulation is just as bad as Harukawa is. So, yeah. Angie will only feel safe if she finds a way to protect herself.” Angie does, however, spare Gonta a fleeting look before adding, “and people her God tells her are worthy too.”

Kaito runs a hand through his hair as Gonta looks at Angie owlshly and can’t help but think to himself that Angie should just admit out loud that she wants to keep Gonta safe.

“Angie no need to find way to keep herself safe though because Gonta already decided he gonna keep everyone here safe himself!” Gonta declares. “That includes both of you too!” Then as an afterthought, Gonta says, “and Harukawa as well.”

Angie pauses and remains tight lipped, bobbing her entire body from side to side as she thinks. "...Angie's God thinks it would be for the best if she finds as many ways to keep herself safe as possible and he thinks the Exisals would make a great start."

Something shifts in her demeanour and Kaito mentally raises a brow. Huh. That's strange. Even though Kaito doesn't want Gonta to get hurt, he also wouldn't turn down an offer for help either.

Why doesn't Angie want Gonta's help?

The artist clears her throat and does an abrupt one eighty turn away from the two males, swinging her arms as she marches towards the row of arcade machines and to Kaito's dismay, the brand new one catches her eye.

"Huh? Angie doesn't recognise this!" Angie says as she examines the machine inquisitively. Is she actually interested in the arcade machine or does she just want to change the topic? Either way, that arcade machine is bad news so it would be for the best if he steers Angie away from it.

"It's a part of Shirogane's motive," Kaito tells her, frowning as Angie all but ignores him and starts making childish shooting noises as she jerks the joystick around. "So you know, maybe you shouldn't be screwing around with the machine?"

She doesn't get his hint, either that or she isn't listening to him properly. "Oh wow, Angie hasn't played on one of these before!"

"If machine part of Shirogane's motive then maybe we should stay away from it," Gonta says.

"Buuut..." Angie blinks as she spots her picture on the character selection screen. "*Huuuh?* Why's Angie in the game?" She waves at her portrait. "Yoo hoo, hello game Angie!"

"Do you know how arcade machines work?" Kaito sighs. He leans heavily on the side of the machine with his arm, all but towering over Angie as she continues to wave at herself. "Angie, just leave this alone, yeah? It's bad news."

"But Angie's God is telling her..." She looks down at the buttons, her tongue poking out the side of her mouth as she presses down on one delicately, selecting her face. She gasps joyfully as she's taken to another screen. "Angie's God is telling her that she should play this!"

"*Why?*" Kaito lets out an exasperated groan. "You *do* know what a motive is, right?"

"Uh, yeah, Angie isn't stupid," Angie tells him, rolling her eyes. "But..." She licks her lips as she hovers over the Case One button. "Angie's God is telling her...what if there's important information inside of the game?"

"Huh?" Kaito blinks slowly as he spares a glance at the screen.

"Important information...inside game?" Gonta hesitantly stands next to Angie. It seems he doesn't have much experience with arcade machines either as he looks down at it with innocently large eyes. He turns to Kaito. "Do games usually have information in them?"

"I mean..." Kaito awkwardly looks to the side. "Depends on what sort of game you're playing. Since this is a motive made by Shirogane and the Monokubs, I highly doubt that there's anything important for you to find."

Angie tilts her head. "But...Angie thinks this, um, selection screen is kinda weird. Why does Angie have three cases to pick from? Are they, like, actual cases?" She searches around the arcade

machine quietly. “Angie doesn’t see any cases.”

“Neither does Gonta,” Gonta says. “But Angie, should you be playing on game? Even Momota says it’s not safe-”

“Angie is only taking a look,” Angie tells him. She hops up and down as she examines the screen. She’s a little too small to reach the buttons comfortably but she’s tall enough to play on the machine properly. “Besides, Angie is, like, getting this super strong feeling that she should just examine the machine a little more-”

Kaito groans impatiently. “Now you’re just being awkward.”

“Um, no, Angie is just having a look around,” Angie says. “Angie is starting to not like Kaito again.”

“Does that mean you didn’t like me before?!”

Angie laughs teasingly as she spreads her arms out wide. “Angie was just kidding!”

Her smile vanishes as she catches a button, selecting the Case One button as she lowers her hands. Her look of unease is quickly masked with yet another smile and she grins up at the two taller boys, who both share a look of worry.

“Whoops!” Angie slaps her hands over her cheeks as she turns her attention back to the screen. It seems that she’s been loaded into some sort of minigame.

What Kaito notices right away is that Angie is playing as herself. However, instead of looking like herself, she looks more...cute. She’s lacking her more human features and instead has small, adorable eyes and a button nose. Despite the different appearance, there’s no doubt that the character model on the screen has been designed to look like Angie. The artist looks at herself silently.

“Is that me?” Angie ponders curiously. She taps on the screen. “Hey, that *is* Angie!”

“Why Angie so small?” Gonta murmurs. He narrows his eyes. “Huh...that strange. Gonta think Angie’s model look kind of familiar. Well, not Angie herself but how she looks...”

“Yeah, now that you mention it...” Kaito rubs his chin slowly before spluttering. “Actually hold on a second! We shouldn’t even be looking at the screen right now!”

“Eh? But what’s the problem? Angie is only playing as herself,” Angie says before her eyes light up. “Oh! Angie actually recognises where she is! She’s in the art room that’s upstairs!” She points around the screen excitedly. “Look! Angie recognises that pile of wax! Oh! And those paints too!” She pushes her face against the screen, using her hands to pull herself up. “Hmm, but Angie doesn’t recognise those four things hanging from the ceiling. They’re kind of too blurry to make out.”

“Don’t worry, Gonta have excellent vision! Maybe he can figure out what blurs are!” Gonta reassures her and leans in closer to try and make out the four blurs. Kaito reluctantly looks at the blurs himself. He can’t make out what they are but he does think that they are rather distinct colours. Pink. Green. Grey. Dark blue. “Hmm, Gonta don’t think he knows what he’s looking at.”

“Maybe it’s just some sort of error then?” Angie gasps with delight as she figures out how to move herself, using the joystick to make herself waddle around the room. “Oh my!”

“Okay, Angie, that’s enough now,” Kaito says. Whilst he’s totally not the sort of person to back down from a challenge, the idea of playing something because Tsumugi wants him to pisses him off.

“Aw, but Angie is having so much fun!” Angie pouts before jumping up and down excitedly. “Oh look! Something has come up on the screen!”

With a suffering sigh, Kaito looks to where Angie is pointing. A line of text has appeared on the top of the screen.

Objective: find a candle

“A...candle?” Angie doesn’t seem too phased by the odd objective. She continues to make her character roam around the room. “Hmm, Angie wonders why the game is making her look for a candle. It’s not like it’s dark!”

“Gonta didn’t know game included objectives,” Gonta murmurs. “Does Angie win game if she does what game tells her to?”

“Oh, oh! Angie likes winning!” Angie starts to click as she moves, advancing from only using the joystick to using both the stick and buttons. It seems she’s grasped how to use the arcade machine rather easily.

“Seriously?” Kaito crosses his arms. “After *everything* I’ve said-”

“Ah! Angie walked into a door and left her room!” Angie puffs her cheeks out. “Aw, but Angie liked it in the art room!”

It’s like she doesn’t care, which Kaito supposes is more true than false at this point. However, what catches his attention is that he knows where her avatar is. Even though everything looks cartoonish, Angie’s avatar is without a doubt in the hallway of the fourth floor of the very school they’re in.

His stomach clenches uncomfortably.

Angie makes a series of excited noises as she roams the halls, entering room after room looking for a candle. She starts huffing after several minutes of fruitless searching and Kaito hopes that this is enough for Angie to back away when she finally enters a certain room.

There’s a grey figure kneeling on the floor, cutting up one of the floorboards with a comically large cartoon saw. However, what gives Kaito the chills is how realistic the sound effects are. The sound of the saw cutting through the wood sounds almost *real*.

A small exclamation mark appears above both of the character’s heads, a very game-like *ting* playing out loud as the marks disappear.

“Um...” Angie suddenly looks uncomfortable and lets out a nervous laugh. “Who is that?”

“Gonta doesn’t know,” Gonta murmurs quietly.

Angie starts to pull on the joystick and grimaces when her character doesn’t move. “Angie can’t move.”

“Maybe you’re in a cutscene?” Kaito suggests. The uneasy feeling festering in his gut starts to grow. “C’mon guys, shouldn’t we get going-”

The grey figure picks up the wooden board they had just cut as Angie's avatar automatically reaches for a candle. The three watch silently as a brand new objective appears on the screen for Angie to follow.

~~Objective: find a candle~~

New Objective: Die

A sickening thud is heard as the grey figure suddenly hits Angie and her avatar collapses to the floor. Once again, Kaito can't help but feel that the sound effects that the game is using sound a little *too* real. Angie gasps, stumbling back as a cutscene plays out. Her avatar is dragged all the way back to the art room.

The screen turns black. Kaito catches a glimpse of everyone's horrified expressions in the reflection of the glass.

A very gruesome squelch echoes around the room.

~~Objective: Die~~

Out of place cheerful music plays as the menu appears on the screen once more. All three of them continue to start at the screen in disbelief.

"...huh?" Gonta's eyes are wide with unfiltered fear. "What...happened?"

"My character died," Angie murmurs. "Angie died."

"...what kind of sick fucking joke is this?!" Kaito slams his hand against the side of the machine with a yell, causing the arcade machine to rattle. He *knew* this machine was going to be nothing but trouble but he didn't expect *that*. What the fuck are these sadistic minigames?!

Angie's throat bobs as she swallows heavily, a shaky hand reaching up to play with the seashell on her necklace. "Did...did that actually happen?"

"Hah?" Kaito looks down at her with an arched brow.

"Angie..." The artist looks at the arcade machine blankly, continuing to play with her necklace silently. "Someone killed Angie."

"Maybe all this one horrible joke?" Gonta hesitantly suggests. "G-Gonta check his profile too! Maybe...Maybe Angie's game was just some, um, some sort of accident!"

Gonta clumsily navigates his way through the character selection menu, nervously pressing down on a button as he finds his own portrait.

"Gonta, dude, I really don't think-"

"Gonta hoping game just...just showed wrong thing for Angie!" Gonta says. He's also greeted with three options. "Um, which case should Gonta go for? Maybe Case One is bad for everyone? Oh, Gonta knows! Gonta pick Case Two! Maybe that one more cheerful?"

Kaito swears under his breath and starts to pace as Gonta selects the second case. He spares a couple of glances at the machine as he walks back and forth.

Gonta's character avatar is the same style as Angie's but instead of being put in a room to explore, it looks like Gonta's minigame is more of a beat 'em up style game. He's in the dormitory and

there's a cowering grey figure behind Gonta's avatar.

The entomologist chews his lip nervously as he waits for an objective to appear. Gonta furiously wipes his sweaty palms on his trousers before grabbing the joystick once more.

"L-Look, Gonta's game looks different," Gonta points out. "Maybe Angie's game was just a cruel joke-"

Objective: Protect ?????

"Eh?!" Gonta jumps as several colourful blurs prowl onto the screen. They look glitchy and rushed, as if someone decided to add in several placeholders into the game instead of taking the time to make some proper assets. "What...what are those?!"

One of them lunges forward and Gonta's avatar takes damage as he's hit. In the top right corner is a health bar. When Gonta is hit, the bar shakes before lowering ever so slightly.

Gonta loses a significant amount of health before he figures out how to fight back. He starts spamming the buttons and Gonta's avatar starts to hit the blurs. However, when Kaito checks the health bar for the enemies, he sees that there's hardly any damage being done. He grits his teeth as Gonta desperately hits the buttons over and over again.

His efforts are futile. Gonta cries out as his avatar falls to the floor and timidly looks at his health bar. He's only got one slither of health left.

~~Objective: Protect ?????~~

Objective: Die

Like before, the screen turns to black before a horrible sound is played. Kaito cringes as the sound plays out for much longer than Angie's did. He looks at Gonta quietly and notices that he's gone sickly pale.

"Oh...Gonta also died," Gonta says quietly. "Gonta failed objective too. Couldn't keep mystery person safe." He sniffles. "Gonta...Gonta failure."

"The arcade machine was a trap from the start, Gonta," Kaito reassures him, gritting his teeth as the annoying menu music starts up again. "I bet every game on it is just one big sick mindfuck to scare us all."

"Are games...real?" Gonta asks hesitantly. "It's just...Gonta..." He takes his glasses off to wipe them as his eyes go misty. "The fear Gonta felt playing game felt familiar, like Gonta had felt same fear before."

Kaito grimaces. "It's like I said, since Shirogane and the Monokubs are responsible for making the games, of course they're going to be full of bullshit. Let's just leave now and-"

"Maybe Kaito should try one of his games?" Angie suggests softly, looking at the arcade machine warily when Kaito stares at her in shock. "Just to make sure that everyone has similar games."

"What kind of logic is that?!"

"But what if Case Three has different sort of game? Happier one?" Gonta adds. "Shouldn't we check just to make sure-"

“Absolutely not.” Kaito crosses his arms with a huff. “I *knew* I was right when I said this arcade machine is a trap.” He averts his gaze when both Angie and Gonta look at him with almost wounded looks on their faces. He sighs softly. “Listen, when things get tough then sometimes there’s no other choice but to retreat. Whilst I’m the sort of person who doesn’t like to run away from their problems...” He eyes the machine cautiously. “This isn’t something I want to deal with.”

“Well, if no one else is playing then it’s time I handed these out!”

The astronaut jumps as Monotaro waddles into the room holding two manila folders. A couple of stray papers pop out of the sides of them.

“What the hell?” Kaito frowns as Monotaro approaches the trio with the folders. “What the fuck are in those folders?”

“These are prizes for completing your minigames!” Monotaro explains. “These folders go into more detail about the cases Angie and Gonta played. Specifically, what happened to them that caused them to die.”

“What?!” Gonta stumbles back as Monotaro tries to pass Gonta a folder. “Gonta didn’t know he’d win this!”

“Well, of course we decided to keep this a surprise! Surprises are fun!” Monotaro gleefully responds. “Each folder even come with gruesome photographs of each murder scene!”

Kaito notices Gonta’s expression fall and it’s enough to turn his vision red. As Monotaro tries to press a folder into Angie’s hands, Kaito slaps both of the folders out of Monotaro’s paws, causing paper and photographs to flutter around the room messily.

“Do you think this is fucking funny?!” Kaito notices that his hands are trembling but he does nothing to try and stop the shaking. Monotaro squeaks as a piece of paper lands on his head. “*Do you?!?*”

“Ah!” Monotaro panics as Kaito slowly storms towards him. “W-Well-”

“Our suffering isn’t for your entertainment!” Kaito doesn’t know where this sudden feeling of anger has come from. All that he knows is that he’s being consumed by it. “You’re sick, you know that?! Fucking sick!”

“Um, um...” Monotaro somehow manages to produce a fine layer of sweat across his body.

He tries to grab the red Monokub but Monotaro must anticipate this and runs out of the room yelping. Kaito tries to go after him but a strong hand latches onto his wrist.

“Momota, please calm down!” Gonta pleads. “Gonta no want Momota to get into trouble if he hurt Monokub!”

“That asshole deserves it!” Kaito fiercely insists. He feels restless. He feels like if he doesn’t... punch something *right now* then he’s going to lose his mind. His judgement is clouded with raw anger. He feels like he’s never going to be satisfied until he breaks all of the Monokubs with his own two hands.

Angie swallows as she backs away timidly, eyes following Kaito’s fist as it continues to violently tremble.

Gonta lets him go and Kaito goes back to pacing. His ears roar as blood pumps through his body like a whirlwind. Fast and unstoppable and aggressive. He stomps all over the pieces of paper and photographs during his rampage, not caring as he turns the white pieces of paper brown with dust.

The stupid fucking song playing from the arcade machine catches his attention and he stares at the machine like a predator looking down its prey. The playful jingle makes his blood boil, makes his fist tremble just a little more.

So he punches the arcade machine. *Hard*. His fist goes through the glass screen and the music glitches out before stopping abruptly. He hears Gonta gasp and Angie suck in a sharp breath. He hears his own heavy breathing as his rage starts to simmer down. He wiggles his fingers that are still inside of the machine and isn't too surprised when he feels a couple of spikes of pain.

Kaito pulls his hand from the arcade machine, breathing heavily as he notices that his hand is covered in a couple of cuts that vary in size. He watches as blood bubbles from one of the larger cuts. He shudders as a droplet of blood splashes onto the floor.

“Momota!” Gonta looks at him with a mixture of disapproval and worry. “You’re hurt.”

Kaito wants to tell him that it’s nothing, that he’s fine. He just has a couple of scratches because he stupidly punched a glass screen. Instead, he looks down at his hand with a mixture of shame and leftover anger.

What the hell am I doing?

Getting worked up to the point of hurting himself...fuck, he’s playing right into Tsumugi’s hands. He flexes his hand, wincing as pain shoots up his fingers. He doubts he’s broken anything but he feels every single cut throb. Another slither of blood trickles onto the floor.

“Gonta...Gonta find help!” Gonta decides before dashing out of the room, completely ignoring the mess of papers on the floor.

As Gonta leaves, Angie chews her lip before following after him wordlessly.

The shame he feels doubles.

—

Of course it’s Kirumi who ends up sorting him out. They end up in the A/V room, both of them sitting on the couch. Kirumi has a first aid kit on her lap and she’s quiet as she weaves bandages around Kaito’s fingers.

Gonta and Angie must’ve decided to not watch her work. Kaito wonders if he’s scared them or if they’ve simply found something else better to do. He has a feeling that it’s the first option.

He can tell that there’s a lecture sitting right on the tip of Kirumi’s tongue. She had looked disapproving when she first saw the state of his hand before sighing. She probably realised lecturing him over punching a screen is probably pointless at this point. Maybe if she had been in the games room then she might’ve stopped him before he did something so stupid.

Kaito still can’t put into words why he got so mad. He just saw Gonta’s pale skin and something in him snapped like an overstretched elastic band. Gonta’s face doesn’t suit fear and frowns and tears. It suits smiles and relaxed expressions.

He just doesn’t get how Tsumugi managed to create such a fucked up game. The arcade machine

itself was only a small part of a huge motive too. Fuck, he should've just dragged Angie and Gonta out of the games room the first chance he got. He should've put his foot down with Angie and swallowed his pride. Instead, he watched her and Gonta play with morbid curiosity.

As Kirumi wraps another finger, Kaito awkwardly looks to the side to avoid her gaze. He can tell that she's not exactly pleased with him. Then again, who would be pleased with someone for punching glass and hurting themselves? He is grateful, however, that she's not looking at him with pity. *God*, he doesn't think he could handle it if she does. Being pitied is one of the worst feelings ever.

Kaito does not want to be pitied by his sidekick.

"Does it hurt?" Kirumi asks as she tightens the bandage. It causes a slight twinge of discomfort but it's nothing too unbearable so Kaito shrugs dismissively. The maid narrows her eyes before sighing. "Momota, if I've done the bandages too tight then-"

"I'm fine," he quickly says. "I'm fine."

"Please don't lie to me," Kirumi responds. She continues to spin bandages around his hand quietly. The only sound in the room is a noisy continuous hum coming from the projector above their heads.

Kaito laughs incredulously and almost pulls his hand away. "I'm not lying! I'm totally fine!"

"You punched an arcade machine," Kirumi states flatly.

"That's because..." Kaito swallows and the shame from earlier slowly creeps back. How the hell do you tell someone you punched an arcade machine because you were pissed off without making yourself look bad?

"Yonaga and Gokuhara told me about the games they played," Kirumi tells him. She momentarily lets go of his hand to assess her work. "They told me that the games were horrible, that they had to watch themselves die."

"They had to watch their characters die," Kaito corrects her quietly. He clears his throat as Kirumi raises an eyebrow at him. "But I suppose that's kind of the same thing."

"And apparently one of the Monokubs came along and tried to give them both a folder each containing information about how they both died?" Kirumi continues, sounding more and more wary. "Is this true?"

Kaito nods. "Yeah, that's what all the mess is on the floor in the games room."

Kirumi chooses to remain quiet for a couple of seconds. She starts to straighten out the contents inside of the first aid box. "And did you play anything on the arcade machine?"

"I'm not stupid," Kaito huffs with a deep frown.

"I know you're not stupid," Kirumi says. "Neither are Yonaga or Gokuhara for playing on the arcade machine in the first place."

There's a silent *however* that lingers uncomfortably.

"...the arcade machine was just Shirogane messing with us, right?" Kaito asks feebly. He examines his hand and counts all of the different stripes he can see from where the bandages overlap. "Just

can't help but think, you know, the minigames that were available to play have actually happened before..."

Kirumi grimaces. "Do you think that Shirogane intended for us to play minigames that showed us how we died in previous games?"

"...yeah, I think that was her intention," Kaito answers. He feels his jaw start to lock. "I reckon the case files that you win after beating the minigame includes *all* of the information about how you died." He swallows. "I bet that also includes the name of the person who killed you too."

It sounds like something Tsumugi would do. Make you experience your death a second time before supplying you with the gory details on how you died and giving you the name of your killer. Information like that is dangerous.

If the wrong person played and felt too put off about the person who killed them then they might've gone after them in revenge. I didn't think too much about the arcade machine at all when Tsumugi first announced it but it seems like it was almost the perfect motive to get us all to turn on each other. Well, it would've been perfect if it still worked.

Kirumi covers her mouth as she processes Kaito's realisation. "That's...that's horrible."

"Yeah, well, everything about the situation we're in is horrible," Kaito tells her. "No, it's more than horrible. It's fucked up."

"I must remember to check in on Yonaga and Gokuhara later on when I have the chance. They both must be shaken by what they saw," Kirumi says. "Did either of them happen to read their case files?"

Kaito shakes his head, bashfully rubbing his nose as he says, "I, uh, kind of punched them out of Monotaro's paws before either of them got the chance to read what was on them."

To his surprise, Kirumi's lips twitch upwards fleetingly before her usual stoic expression takes over. "I see. I suppose it's a good thing you intervened then."

"I..." Kaito scrunches his face up as he looks for something to focus his attention on. "I'd hardly call what I did intervening. I just...really wanted to fucking knock those files out of his paws."

"Even so, you doing that meant neither Yonaga or Gokuhara had to face the horror of reading what they had to go through," Kirumi points out. "Whilst I suppose you could've handled taking the files from Monotaro differently, all that matters is they weren't read in the end." She straightens her back. "In fact, as soon as we're done here then I'll clean up the files myself and dispose of them accordingly. It's the least I can do."

"...I should've stopped them," Kaito mumbles softly. He's surprised when Kirumi looks at him curiously. "Shit. Did he say that out loud?"

"Momota, you do realise you're not responsible for their actions?" Kirumi asks him. "They both picked to play on the arcade machine despite knowing that it was a part of Shirogane's motive."

Kaito frowns. "I'm responsible for keeping them safe. That's what a good leader does, they keep people safe." He wrinkles his nose before flopping backwards onto the couch, resting his neck on a cushion and staring up at the ceiling. He groans and runs his hands down his face, tugging on his skin a little too harshly.

Good job, hero. This is the second time he's made a fool of himself in front of Kirumi.

“You did keep them safe though,” Kirumi points out. Kaito lifts his head up and looks at her quietly. “Whilst the way you went about it wasn’t exactly...the best, you *did* prevent them from reading potentially upsetting information-”

“They still have some idea of how they died though because of what they saw,” Kaito counters. “And, fuck, the sounds that were included...Tojo, they sounded so realistic. It was horrible.”

He hears the sound of wood cracking over someone’s head. He hears the sound of metal hitting skin. Kaito grits his teeth as his fists start to tremble once more. It’s like every single nerve and cell and bone in his body wants him to punch something again. It’s like his body is in fight or flight mode and his instincts are telling him to go all in on fighting his way out of this hellhole.

“What’s done is done, Momota,” Kirumi tells him calmly. “You can’t change what happened so the next best thing you can do is move on and learn from your mistakes. Yes, maybe you should’ve done more to stop them but at the same time both Yonaga and Gokuhara are also responsible for their own actions too.”

Translation: you fucked up, spaceman. Now do better.

She’s right. Of course she’s right. Kaito just didn’t anticipate things getting this bad. He didn’t anticipate that some people here might not want to listen to him. He didn’t anticipate Tsumugi’s motive being so fucked up. He didn’t anticipate just how much he’s going to have to deal with.

See, Kaito is used to dealing with a different sort of danger. He’s used to learning how to put on his spacesuit properly so he doesn’t accidentally cause himself to suffocate once he reaches space. He’s used to flashing lights and blaring alarms as he tries out different simulations during astronaut training. He’s used to giving people pep talks about how everything is going to be okay.

When he eventually goes to space he knows he’s going to have an entire team of people down on earth watching over him, guiding him as he explores a brand new unknown. He knows that he’s got countless people who are going to do everything in their power to get him home.

All he has here is Maki’s word that she’s going to get everyone out of the simulation and fuck, he is clinging onto that word hard. Onto that promise.

He still feels like he’s in some sort of freaky nightmare and truth be told if he actually woke up now in his own bed miles and miles away from this hell then he’d be over the moon. He wouldn’t mind jumping out of his bed and rushing into his living room. Both of his grandparents would be there, his grandfather on the couch reading his newspaper and his grandmother cooking bacon in her usual frying pan. She always cooks enough for everyone and *always* slides Kaito an extra slice because he’s a growing boy.

God, he misses home. He misses watering his plants that sit by his window. He misses running laps around his neighbourhood to keep himself fit. He misses the greetings he receives from practically every neighbour because everyone knows everyone where he lives. He misses his grandmother’s cooking. He misses his grandfather’s teasing. He misses lying on his bed and looking up at his ceiling that is covered in old sticky stars that glow in the dark.

But he can’t tell anyone this. He can’t.

He’s Kaito Momota. He’s untouchable. He’s a force of nature. He’s going to conquer the sea, the land and the sky. He’s going to conquer the entire universe.

He’s going to get everyone out of here.

“Momota?” Kirumi looks at him expectantly, a faint frown growing between her brows. “Are you okay?”

Kaito Momota is always okay! Always. All of *this*, him punching a machine and accidentally implying that he could’ve done more is just a blip. A tiny slip up.

He offers Kirumi a grin that is brighter than the sun and says, “of course I am!”

Because he is. He’s fine. He’s fine and he’s going to get everyone out of here because that’s what he’s decided.

Maki looks surprisingly upset when she notices the bandages on his hand. They both inevitably bump into each other after the small check in everyone went to during the late afternoon.

“You’re hurt,” Maki murmurs. They are both sitting outside under the wisteria. Whilst everyone else left after the mini meeting, both Kaito and Maki had lingered behind. She reaches for his hand tentatively before pulling away at the last second.

“I’m not that hurt,” Kaito tells her bashfully. “Just scratched myself, that’s all.”

Maki, however, looks like she doesn’t believe him. He sees her expression start to darken. “Did someone do this to you?”

“What? *No!* I just said I scratched myself!” Kaito splutters. He cradles his hand to his chest almost protectively, as if shielding his bandaged hand from Maki’s scrutinising gaze.

She narrows her eyes before clicking her tongue. “How?”

“I, uh...” Kaito laughs awkwardly. “That’s not important-”

She shoots him an unimpressed look. “Of course it’s important. You’re hurt and you won’t tell me what happened.” She looks at him sharply. “Hey, you’re not protecting anyone are you?”

“How many times do I have to tell you that I simply scratched myself?” Kaito sighs. He wiggles his fingers. “Look, I can still use my hand so what’s the big deal?”

“...I just don’t like seeing you hurt,” Maki mumbles, puffing her cheeks out.

“Oh.” He wasn’t expecting such a...tender response from her. There’s a slight pink flush dusting her cheeks and Kaito wonders if she’s embarrassed about admitting such a thing out loud.

For an assassin, she can be quite emotional. Tch, she shouldn’t be so embarrassed about saying what she thinks.

Maki starts to fiddle with her hair, using her nimble fingers to weave a couple of strands together before undoing her work before she makes a knot. She looks tired. Exhausted. The bags under her eyes are starting to look a lot more prominent. It makes Kaito want to remind her that he’s here to help her. He wishes she wasn’t so stubborn.

“I’m not actually that hurt, you know?” Kaito tells her. “I quite literally have just a couple of scratches, that’s all. In fact, I probably wouldn’t have even bandaged my hand but Tojo insisted that she help me-”

“Tojo bandaged you?” Maki hastily interjects before clearing her throat. “Why didn’t you come to

me for help? I'm capable of cleaning up wounds when needed."

"W-Well it was Gonta and Angie who told Tojo to help me," Kaito admits. "If I had it my way then I would've just left my hand alone. I mean, it's not that bad!" He purses his lips. "Well, I suppose Tojo did have to dig out a tiny piece of glass."

"*Glass?*" Maki goes back to looking at him with the intensity of a hawk. "Why was there glass in your hand?"

"Only a tiny piece!" Kaito retorts defensively. He huffs and crosses his arms. "I mean, I guess it was inevitable that a small piece ended up in one of my cuts. That screen was made out of some thick glass, after all."

He realises talking out loud to himself is probably not the smartest idea. Maki stares at him with barely concealed worry. "Momota, what did you punch?"

"...the arcade machine," Kaito answers sheepishly.

"The arcade machine," Maki repeats slowly before massaging her forehead. "Why did you punch the arcade machine?"

"Because it was pissing me off," Kaito says with a self righteous huff. "Do you know what was on it?" When Maki shakes her head, Kaito starts to rant. "There were these stupid fucking minigames on it that turned out to be recreations of how people have previously died here."

"Really?" The genuine surprise in Maki's voice catches him off guard momentarily. He's used to her speaking with a flat voice.

Kaito nods. "Yeah. I watched Angie and Gonta play a game each." He digs his fingers into his jacket as the consistent need to deck something makes his bones itch. "Angie was given an objective to find a candle. However, after she did, she ended up being hit over the head by this grey figure and then..." The sound effect played afterwards echoes around his head. Kaito grimaces.

Maki's eyes go wide. "...that's how she died in the first game."

"Hah?!"

"She was killed by..." Maki hesitates before shaking her head. "Never mind. But that's exactly what happened to her. She left her lab to find a candle and ended up being stunned with a piece of wood. That's not what killed her though."

"Wait, so what..."

"She was stabbed through the neck with a katana," Maki tells him quietly. "If it helps, she probably died instantaneously."

So the minigames *were* based on previous killing games. Damn it.

"What did Gonta see?" Maki asks gently. "He...he didn't see what happened to him during the first game, right?"

"I don't know, he played a different case number to Angie," Kaito admits. "He was fighting five colourful blurs." When Maki raises an eyebrow, Kaito shrugs helplessly. "I dunno what you want me to say! It's what I saw."

“Five colourful blurs...” Maki murmurs before her eyes light up with realisation. “Ah...those were the Exisals.” Her eyes flicker towards the dormitory sadly. “He died during the second game trying to protect Angie from some Exisals. Neither of them survived.”

Fuck, no wonder Gonta is so terrified of the Exisals. If he died trying to take on all five...

“What a fucked up way to go,” Kaito mutters, shaking his head slowly. He hits his thigh with a fisted hand. “Fuck...”

Maki awkwardly chews on her lip. She doesn’t offer any condolences about the death being quick. It makes Kaito feel sick. “Hey, Momota...”

“Yeah?”

“You didn’t...” She wrings her hands together in her lap. She suddenly looks incredibly nervous, or perhaps nauseous. She licks her lips. “You didn’t happen to play any minigames, did you?”

“Of course I didn’t! I knew that the arcade machine was nothing but bad news!” Kaito answers. He misses how Maki’s shoulder’s slump dramatically and the small sigh of relief that escapes past her lips. “I mean, even Angie asked me to play just to make sure that each minigame was similar but...”

“It’s a good thing you didn’t,” Maki tells him.

Kaito stops himself from turning his crossed arms into a self comforting hug. The idea of watching himself die doesn’t exactly sound all that appealing. He’s not sure if he even wants to know how he died during each game. No matter what happened to him, he doubts whatever he went through was all that appealing.

Even Maki seems nervous about the idea of him finding out how he died. Fuck, does that mean he died rather gruesome deaths? His stomach flip flops at the thought.

The assassin’s face shifts into something more serious after a couple of moments of silence. “So since you punched the arcade machine does that mean it’s broken?”

“Oh, yeah, it’s definitely broken,” Kaito says, sounding rather pleased with himself. He scratches the back of his neck with a reserved smile. “I’m actually surprised the Monokubs haven’t told me off yet. I mean, they should probably know that the machine is broken by now.”

“I’ll kill them if they even try to touch you,” Maki reassures him and cracks her knuckles.

She looks so sombre that Kaito doesn’t even try to tell her that she doesn’t have to. She looks like she’s already made her mind up. So instead of talking her out of protecting him, Kaito simply chuckles half hearted and says, “uh, thanks.”

Maki seems content with his response and allows herself to relax just a touch. She starts to fumble with one of the belts around her thigh, which Kaito hadn’t noticed at first since her skirt had hidden it. He spots at least two knives dangling from it. In fact, the more Kaito looks at her, the more knives he spots. He’s not sure if he finds this funny or intimidating.

“I hardly think the Monokubs are a threat anymore anyway,” Maki admits. “I’ve seen a couple of them prowling around outside of the dormitory. I think they’re trying to figure out how to get Shirogane out.”

“If they were smart then they’d realise no one can stop them inside of their Exisals,” Kaito points

out.

Maki raises an eyebrow almost teasingly. “No one?”

“Uh...” Kaito smiles helplessly. “Do *you* think you’re capable of taking on the Exisals?”

“Probably,” Maki says. “I’ve put a lot of thought into how I would destroy them one by one. I think I’d make them turn on each other. It’s not like the Monokubs have the best aim in the first place.”

“So you’re set on destroying the Exisals then?”

“Of course,” Maki says before pausing. “Why?”

“Well Angie made this point earlier about how we should maybe keep one or two of them just in case something happens,” Kaito tells her, his voice dipping as she shoots him an exasperated look. “What?”

“I don’t care what Angie thinks. She doesn’t even know how to use an Exisal anyway,” Maki points out. “Why does she want one in the first place?”

“I think she just wants to feel safe,” Kaito admits. “She won’t admit it but I think she’s a lot more scared than she’s letting on.”

Maki sighs. “Angie is too much of a control freak for me to even consider letting her anywhere near an Exisal. Besides, I don’t think we’re going to be staying in this game long enough for us to even need one in the first place.”

“That’s what I thought!” Kaito agrees a little too eagerly. “Once we get out of this hellhole, there’s no way I’m ever coming back! Ever!”

Maki opens her mouth to say something before abruptly closing it with a deep frown. Huh? What’s wrong with her? Was it something he said?

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Maki answers a little too quickly. “I was just thinking about what we we’re going to do after we leave, that’s all.”

“We...leave?” Kaito responds. That’s all there is to it. The exit appears and everyone gets to leave. Simple.

“...right,” Maki murmurs.

“Don’t look so worried!” Kaito ruffles her hair instinctively, snorting as Maki bristles like an angry cat and swats his hands. “If I tell you that everything is going to be fine then that means everything is going to be fine!”

“Idiot,” Maki grumbles as she finally manages to knock Kaito’s hands away.

“Hah?!”

There’s a slight teasing smile on Maki’s face that Kaito almost misses. Almost. However, when he miraculously spots it, it makes his stomach flutter and for the first time today, he wholeheartedly believes that everything is going to be okay.

He bumps into Korekiyo sometime during the evening. They both end up sitting on a bench near the entrance of the academy. Korekiyo hums as he tucks stray strands of hair behind his ears. As the anthropologist does this, Kaito thinks about how hungry he is, pouting when his stomach growls demandingly.

Now, if Kaito is being brutally honest he has no idea what his opinion of Korekiyo is just yet. The anthropologist is...*unique*. He has this strange aura that makes Kaito shudder. Korekiyo, however, also says what's on his mind and Kaito respects that. Unfortunately, the two of them are on absolutely different wavelengths so despite the refreshing honesty, Korekiyo's opinions are something Kaito thinks he doesn't exactly want to hear.

Korekiyo surprisingly decides to strike up a conversation, which Kaito does find the slightest bit weird because in all honesty, he thought the anthropologist hated him. Korekiyo even chuckles when Kaito raises an eyebrow in response to Korekiyo's greeting.

"Let me guess, you think that I don't like you?" Korekiyo says.

Holy shit. Is this guy a mind reader? Kaito swallows.

Korekiyo, if you can hear me then say...Kaito Momota is the coolest person to ever exist!

The anthropologist blinks slowly, his long eyelashes standing out against his clear skin. Does this dude wear mascara?

Unfortunately, Korekiyo does not say that Kaito is the coolest person ever, which unfairly lowers Kaito's opinion on Korekiyo just a little more. The anthropologist does however ask, "why are you staring at me?"

"I'm not!" Kaito insists heatedly, despite literally spending a stretched amount of time gawking at Korekiyo, waiting for him to announce to the world how cool Kaito is.

Korekiyo shrugs and surprisingly drops the accusation just like that. "Whatever you say. I didn't start a conversation with you just to start an argument anyway."

"Why are you talking to me then?" Kaito asks curiously. "I mean..."

"You think just because we have different opinions and views on things I wouldn't want to talk to you?" Korekiyo muses. His mask twitches as he smiles. "Kukuku, you are sorely mistaken. I rarely find myself hating anyone or anything. After all, I find every aspect of humanity to be absolutely fascinating. If anything, I find you intriguing since you think so differently compared to me."

"Eh?" Kaito cocks his head. "Okay then?"

There's an amused twinkle in Korekiyo's eyes. "So, Momota, how are you finding the predicament we're in?"

"Uh, why do you want to know?" Kaito asks.

"Research purposes," Korekiyo admits. "I must admit that I am curious to see how you're coping. After all, you're the most passionate about getting everyone out of here. Let me guess, you're the sort of person who doesn't like to be told what to do?"

"I don't like people telling me I have to kill others for entertainment," Kaito responds through

gritted teeth. “You know, *like any other normal person.*”

Korekiyo’s lack of response is a little bit jarring. Kaito scoots away ever so slightly. “Oh, I see. I expected you to respond as so.”

“You’re making it sound like you wouldn’t mind killing someone,” Kaito grumbles.

Once again, Korekiyo’s mask twitches as his smile grows. “What an interesting observation. Tell me, do you think I look like the sort of person who enjoys murdering people?”

“You *sound* it,” Kaito mumbles and to his surprise, Korekiyo actually laughs at his response.

“I suppose my words can easily be taken the wrong way,” Korekiyo hums. “Fear not, Momota. I have no intention of killing you if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“Gee, thanks.” Kaito wonders if he runs now then maybe he’ll make it to the door before Korekiyo. Whilst the anthropologist has long legs, Kaito has years of training under his belt.

“Oh my, it certainly seems we’ve perhaps gotten off on the wrong foot,” Korekiyo says. “Although I do not think that is entirely my fault...”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Kaito huffs. “You’re the one who keeps saying creepy shit.”

“And you’re the one who interprets me as creepy,” Korekiyo counters. “Whilst I am curious as to why you see me in such a way, I’m much more interested in collecting data for my research. If you have nothing else to say regarding your views on the killing game then I must get going.”

“And do what? Bother someone else?” Kaito frowns at him. “Dude, do you really think it’s appropriate to be pestering people at a time like this? Everyone is already worried enough as it is without you making things ten times worse.”

“I actually think *now* is the best time to be asking such questions,” Korekiyo responds. “After all, we’re nearing the end of our second day here. Soon we’ll all only have twenty four hours left to live.” Korekiyo holds his hands to his chest. “It is rare that people ever find out how long they have left to live. I want to document how everyone is feeling so one day someone can read my work and learn from it.”

“If you want to write about how you’re feeling then fine, be my guest,” Kaito says. “Just don’t fucking bother everyone else. Seriously, at least try to be considerate.”

And at least try to sound even just a little bit concerned. How the hell is he so calm about the fact that he could die tomorrow? Seriously, this dude is fucking weird.

“You’re oddly protective over people you don’t even know,” Korekiyo observes. “You’ve even made yourself the leader of our little group of people. Well, I put that rather lightly. If anything, Tojo has more control over the situation than you do at the moment.” Korekiyo suddenly scowls. “Even Harukawa too.”

“Eh? What’s your problem with Harukawa?” Kaito asks.

Korekiyo looks at him as if he’s just said something incredibly stupid. “I have several problems with Harukawa, the most prominent one being that she’s far too selfish for my liking.” He wrinkles his nose, causing his mask to shudder. “Harukawa certainly does not meet my standards.”

“Well good because like hell would I let Harukawa be with someone like you,” Kaito argues

defensively.

“Oh?” Korekiyo raises an amused eyebrow. “Did you think I was referring to romantic standards?”

Kaito shrugs with a pout. “I mean...”

“I suppose romantically I wouldn’t want to be with her anyway,” Korekiyo muses. “But still, I was actually thinking about how she wouldn’t be a good match to be friends with my sister.” Korekiyo closes his eyes. “No, someone like Harukawa can absolutely not be friends with her.”

“...dude, what the *fuck* are you on about?” Kaito stares at Korekiyo as if he’s grown a second head. No, *three* heads.

Korekiyo dismisses him with a simple wave of his hand. “It doesn’t concern you.”

This guy just keeps getting weirder and weirder. Although...if he’s thinking about introducing some of us to his sister so she can make some friends then does that mean he thinks we’re gonna get out of here soon?

“Hey Shinguji? What do you actually plan on doing once we get out of here?” Kaito asks. “I mean, is your research even going to be valid anyway?” When Korekiyo looks at him curiously, Kaito expands. “Well, it’s just, like, none of us are actually going to die, you know? Even if we think we’re going to die and...might actually die for a little while, since we’re in a simulation we’re just going to be brought back at some point.”

“Ah, you do make quite an excellent point,” Korekiyo admits. “However, research is research. Experience, might I add, is probably one of the best forms of research too. Even if we are in a simulation, the emotions we’re all going to feel as we look death in the eye is going to be real.” He sighs quietly. “It is such a shame we don’t remember any of the previous games. The amount of potential research I have forgotten troubles me greatly.”

“Yeah but...” Kaito pulls a face at Korekiyo’s confusing words. “Doesn’t the idea of dying scare you? I mean, *I’m* not that worried because I believe that the exit is going to be fixed soon but...”

Korekiyo chuckles softly. “To answer your question, no, I am not afraid of dying. After all, I have someone waiting for me.”

He has someone waiting for him? Oh, that’s...kind of sad in a way.

“Well they’re gonna have to wait a little longer because there’s no way any of us are dying tomorrow,” Kaito tells him.

“Kukuku, you’re oddly optimistic despite everything,” Korekiyo observes. “Tell me, aren’t you the slightest bit worried?”

“Hah? Me? *Worried?!?*” Kaito laughs loudly as if Korekiyo has just told the funniest joke in the world. “You’ve got to be kidding! Of course I’m not worried! I have complete faith that everything is gonna be okay!”

“And if everything doesn’t turn out okay?”

“Then I’ll make everything okay myself, duh!” Kaito knocks his fists together. “I don’t want to be stuck here forever! I’ve got so much shit I need to do, like go to space!”

“Is that your number one priority? Going to space?” Korekiyo asks.

Kaito almost chokes on his next breath. “Dude, I’m the Ultimate Astronaut! Of course going to space is, like, on top of my to do list!”

“I see, I see...” Korekiyo rubs his chin. “I suppose it was stupid of me to ask in the first place.”

Kaito looks at him with an expression that screams *well duh*.

Korekiyo pauses before pulling himself. “Well, since it seems our conversation has reached a dead end, I think it’s only appropriate that I continue my research elsewhere.” He smiles. “I must admit, you’re a lot more interesting than I anticipated, Momota. I don’t think I have ever met someone as infuriatingly enthusiastic as you.”

“Hey-”

“Oh, don’t see it as a bad thing,” Korekiyo says. “Someone else might think your relentless optimism is a good thing. It is a matter of opinion, after all.”

Kaito gawks at Korekiyo as he leaves and wonders to himself if he wants to chase after him and ask him what the hell he means. However, his stomach lets out a rather pathetic gurgle, reminding him he hasn’t had any food for quite a while now. Hmm, maybe he should turn a blind eye just this once.

He decides he should probably go lie down for a while so he heads back to the dormitory, pulling a face when he sees a couple of Exisals circling the dormitory from a distance. Maki was right, they really are trying to figure out how to get Tsumugi out. He’s thankful that they don’t give him any hassle as he heads inside.

He spots Maki sitting on the metal steps on the girl’s side of the dormitory, massaging her forehead with a pale hand. Kaito frowns when she doesn’t immediately lift her head up to greet him and heads towards her, his frown growing deeper when she doesn’t even react.

“Harukawa?”

Her head snaps up and Kaito almost startles at the abrupt movement. Her hand drops into her lap as she blinks at him silently. Then, she clicks her tongue as she looks away. Oh. Is she embarrassed that he managed to catch her off guard?

“You okay?” Kaito asks tentatively, taking a seat next to her. He’s used to Maki being quiet and moody but this feels different, like there’s something off.

“I’m fine,” Maki insists quickly.

“Really?” Kaito responds carefully. “I mean, no offence but you look kinda...”

Rough. Tired. Pale.

“I said I’m fine,” Maki says through gritted teeth. Her bangs cast a shadow over her eyes as she lowers her head. “Did you want something?”

“No, but...” Kaito’s face twists in concern. “Harukawa, you really do look exhausted. Did something happen?”

She shakes her head adamantly. “I’ve been in the dormitory the entire time.” She rubs the handle of one of her knives with her thumb. “Keeping an eye on the Exisals and *her*.” Maki jerks her head towards Tsumugi’s door. The hole she had made in it the other day has been crudely fixed with a

couple of planks of wood.

“Yeah but still...” Kaito feels like he’s saying something he’s not supposed to when he says, “you look...really bad.” When she looks at him with a glare, Kaito quickly defends himself. “Not in a horrible way! More in a sort of, well, overworked way.”

“I haven’t done much to be considered overworked,” Maki responds quietly. She watches through the glass door as the blue Exisal approaches before retreating when it spots her. “Tch. Asshole.”

Kaito is surprised to see that the Exisals are still on the loose. He knows he doesn’t want Maki to burden herself too much but with the way she’s been acting, well, he thought she would’ve sorted them out by now. Instead she’s only keeping an eye on them. Did she change her mind about taking them on or something?

“They’re not gonna be an issue once the exit appears, right?” Kaito asks. “I mean, I doubt they’re gonna let us leave so easily.”

“I’ll sort them out,” Maki tells him straight away, as if by reflex. She glares at the machines fiercely before rubbing her head again. “I just need to wait for the right time.”

Kaito quietly looks her up and down. She’s sitting almost hunched over on the stairs, as if she’s too tired to sit up straight. Her skin looks paler than usual and her bangs are sticking to her forehead more than they’re not.

“Hey, Harukawa? Sit still for just a moment,” Kaito murmurs.

Maki raises an eyebrow at him before a flustered flush darkens her cheeks as Kaito rests his hand on her forehead. “Momota, what are you-”

She’s burning up.

“Shit...” Kaito pulls his hand away as Maki scrambles away to the side, wiping her forehead with the back of her hand as if getting rid of the light droplets of sweat on it will change everything.

“Harukawa, you’re burning up.”

“I’m fine-”

“How can you say you’re fine when you’re clearly not?!” Kaito argues, wincing when Maki looks away guiltily. He swallows before sighing. “Harukawa, you’re ill. You shouldn’t be out here-”

“Someone has to keep an eye on the Exisals,” Maki retorts.

“Yeah, someone who isn’t *you*,” Kaito tells her. He steels himself as Maki stares at him incredulously. “Harukawa, I’m not arguing with you. You’re as hot as Ouma was when he was sleepwalking.” The realisation makes his stomach drop. “Wait-”

“I refuse to have what he has,” Maki says. “I’m just a little tired, that’s all.”

“I’m not sure how contagious Despair Disease it-”

“I can’t have it,” Maki insists quickly. She grimaces and rubs her forehead again. “I *refuse* to have it-”

“Hey, hey, hey, calm down.” Kaito smiles at her sympathetically. “Look, I know that you’re probably really worried right now but I’m not gonna let anything bad happen to you, okay?” He

hesitates before letting out a sheepish sigh. “But you’re gonna have to go to your room for a little while-”

“No.” Maki shakes her head adamantly. “I need to stay out here-”

“You need to put yourself first and look after yourself,” Kaito firmly tells her. “You go to bed and rest and I’ll keep an eye on the Exisals, okay?”

Maki shakes her head a little more frantically. “No. *No*. Absolutely not. They’ll tear you to pieces if-”

“I said I’ll keep an eye on them, not fight them!” Kaito reassures her. “But like hell am I going to let you even *think* about fighting them in the state you’re in. Can you even stand?”

Maki grimaces before standing up quickly, as if to prove a point. This, however, isn’t her smartest idea as she wobbles and Kaito dives to catch her by her shoulders when she sways a little too violently.

“See!” Kaito sighs gently. He can feel Maki shivering, even though it’s fairly warm out. He knows she probably doesn’t want to be babied right now but all he wants to do is make sure she’s okay and make sure that she gets somewhere safe.

Maki pulls away with a grumble, wrapping her arms around herself tightly. “I stood up a little too quickly, that’s all.”

“You’re ill,” Kaito says softly. He watches as she shakes silently on the spot and rolls his eyes fondly. He slips his jacket from his shoulder and carefully drapes it over Maki’s own, making sure it’s secure as he says, “Harukawa, please just rest. I’ll make sure that everything is fine, okay?”

Maki lightly grasps the edges of Kaito’s jacket with wide eyes before her face turns a startling shade of red. Kaito, of course, instantly panics.

Is turning red super fast a side effect of Despair Disease?! She looks like she’s gonna pass out any second!

“...o-okay then,” Maki stammers out. She pauses before passing him one of her knives, which is on the larger side. Kaito gapes at it helplessly. “Take it. You know, just in case you need to defend yourself.”

“O-Okay!” Kaito holds the knife between two fingers by the handle and watches it dangle. She wants him to use this to protect himself?!

Kaito watches as Maki stumbles towards her room, tightening Kaito’s jacket around herself as she reaches his door. When she’s about to step into her room, she hesitates before giving Kaito a small wave goodbye.

The astronaut doesn’t know why but he finds this rather amusing. He waves back at her enthusiastically and keeps his eyes trained on the door until he hears it lock.

—

Kaito spends the next couple of hours alone sitting on the metal steps. He switched to the boy’s side of the dormitory for...manly reasons. He *definitely* didn’t move because Tenko glared at him when she went to bed.

The Exisals come and go every half hour. The first time they spot that Maki isn't in charge of guarding the dormitory, the blue one tried to charge inside. However, when Kaito showed off the knife Maki had given him, the Exisal left without much fuss. Tch. The Monokubs are such *cowards*.

He yawns as he stretches his back like a cat. Fuck, he's so tired. The lack of food is slowly getting to him. Sure, it's only been like two days but a lack of food always eventually takes its toll. He's glad that he's sitting down and doesn't have to stand.

He's in the midst of yet another yawn when he hears a door creak open. Kaito lazily cracks an eye open and tilts his head backwards. He notices Kiibo close Kokichi's door very carefully before turning to head to Kaito's door. However, when the robot spots Kaito sitting on the steps he falters.

"Um..." Kiibo tilts his head to the side. "I thought Harukawa was supposed to be out here."

"Harukawa is sick," Kaito tells him and Kiibo's eyes go large with surprise.

"Really?" Kiibo starts to frown. "Oh dear, that's not good."

"Hey, don't worry. I've taken over for her," Kaito reassures him with a confident grin. "I'm not gonna let anything bad happen!"

"Well if you're sure..."

Kaito nods passionately before faltering. "Wait, what are you doing out here? Did something happen? Is Ouma okay?"

"I, ah, was actually on my way to find you," Kiibo admits, wringing his hands together. "I'm low on battery so I need to charge. I know that you're relying on me but I'm actually very close to automatically going into standby mode."

"Oh!" It never crossed Kaito's mind that Kiibo actually needed to charge. "Well if you gotta charge then you gotta charge."

"I was going to ask if you could take over and keep an eye on Ouma but, well, if Harukawa managed to catch what Ouma has so easily then maybe you shouldn't go into his room," Kiibo murmurs. "That and you're already preoccupied."

"It does make you wonder how transmissible Despair Disease is," Kaito sighs. "I mean, Harukawa hasn't even gone into Ouma's room and she still managed to get it."

"Uh..." Kiibo shakes his head. "That's wrong. Harukawa has been in Ouma's room today. Twice."

"Eh?" Kaito raises an eyebrow. "Are you sure?"

"Yes I'm sure!" Kiibo retorts, looking somewhat offended that Kaito sounds wary of him. "I've been in there the entire time! The first time she came in was to break some videos. That time she had worn the right protection to keep herself safe."

Kaito purses his lips. "And the second time?"

"Well she kind of came into his room in a rush," Kiibo admits. He rolls his eyes with a large shrug. "And she didn't have anything to protect herself on. She just started, well, this is going to sound strange but she started cleaning his whiteboards." He pouts. "And when I asked her why she told me to mind my own business."

She...cleaned Kokichi's whiteboards? "We're on about the whiteboards that were covered in photos, right?"

"That's correct," Kiibo says. "She stripped them both clean and wiped everything from them before leaving without a word. I mean, she spent a good five minutes cleaning so maybe during that time she managed to catch something from Ouma?"

Five minutes is a rather slim time period to catch something from someone. However, it's not like Kaito knows how this stupid Despair Disease works. He groans loudly and runs a hand down his face. "Yeah, it seems like it. She was burning up when I last saw her so I sent her to bed."

"So that's potentially two people who now have Despair Disease," Kiibo murmurs. "That's... really not good."

"I think we'll just have to keep them both in their rooms until it's safe for them to leave," Kaito says. "Although...if they're both sick then that means now we're gonna need two people to keep an eye on them."

"With how infectious Despair Disease is, I highly recommend that no one but me goes into their rooms," Kiibo suggests. He grimaces. "However, I can't be at two places at once and I'm already low on battery as it is..."

"Well how about this then?" Kaito claps his hands together loudly. "I'll keep an ear out and if it sounds like one of them needs help I'll come and get you. I mean, I haven't heard anything from Harukawa for the last couple of hours so I assume that she's asleep. How's Ouma doing?"

"He's awake," Kiibo admits. "I told him I was going to ask you if you could, ah, keep an eye on him. I suppose if you explain through the door what you plan to do instead then that'll satisfy him."

"And how has he been throughout the day?" Kaito asks. "He's not caused you any trouble, right?"

"Not necessarily," Kiibo answers. Kiibo, however, suddenly stares at the floor with a dejected smile.

"Kiibo?"

"...we played roughly one thousand games of Rock, Paper, Scissors since Ouma was bored," Kiibo says, his voice barely above a whisper. "I lost every single game."

Kaito can't help it. He starts to laugh helplessly into a fist, hoping to disguise his sudden laughter with a fake cough. Kiibo must see through him however as his smile is replaced with something more accusing.

"I-I tried my very best to win!" Kiibo insists heatedly. "But it's like he knew what I was going to do!"

"Dude, how did you lose a thousand-"

"I'm going to my room to charge," Kiibo huffs, pouting as Kaito continues to laugh at him. He closes his door a little too loudly.

Kaito chuckles to himself even as he heads to Kokichi's room and knocks on the door. He waits a couple of moments before hearing a voice croak out a very quiet, "yes?"

“Ouma, it’s me,” Kaito says. His giggles finally die down. “Just letting you know that I’m gonna be right outside your room if you need me, okay? Kiibo and I don’t think it’s safe for anyone but him to go inside your room for the moment. Is that okay?”

Kokichi doesn’t respond for quite some time and Kaito suddenly wonders if he’s upset Kokichi with his news. He hears a muffled noise that suspiciously sounds like someone heading towards the door. Kaito rolls his eyes and opens his mouth to repeat what he just said when the shuffling stops. He then hears the sound of something sliding down the door.

“...Ouma, you’re not sitting by your door, are you?”

“And what if I am?” Kokichi is a lot easier to understand since he’s by his door. However, that defeats the entire purpose of him being in his room to rest and be somewhere comfortable.

“You should stay in bed,” Kaito tells him. “You’re not well.”

“I’ve been in bed *all day*,” Kokichi grumbles. “Boring old Kiibo wouldn’t let me get out of it.”

“So what? You taught him a lesson by absolutely destroying him in several games of Rock, Paper, Scissors?” Kaito counters teasingly.

He can hear the grin in Kokichi’s voice as he says, “well of course.”

This guy is an absolute menace. Well, I suppose he could’ve done something a lot worse. In fact, imagining Kokichi beating Kiibo so many times is actually kind of funny. At least it sounds like he’s had somewhat of a good day.

Kaito rolls his eyes playfully. “Honestly...”

“Do you want to play?”

“Huh?” The question catches him off guard. “I mean, don’t we both have to be in the same room to play? After all, we both need to see what the other person is doing.”

“Not exactly,” Kokichi responds. “We can just tell each other what we’ve picked. Simple!”

“Oh yeah? And how can I trust you won’t lie?” Kaito counters.

There’s a long pause. “...well I trust you won’t lie to me.”

Ah...that’s right. Trusting Disease. Kokichi trusts Kaito not to cheat so he clearly expects the same of Kaito. It’s actually sort of *endearing* in a way. In any other circumstance, Kaito probably would’ve refused the offer since the chances of someone cheating is far too high. However...

He peers through the glass doors and sees that the Exisals are too far away to cause any trouble. He then checks his pocket, where he left his knife. It’s still there, a heavy and scary weight.

“Momota?”

“I suppose it won’t hurt to play,” Kaito mumbles as he makes himself comfortable, sliding his back down Kokichi’s door before sitting cross legged in front of it. “Best of three, okay? Then you have to go back to bed. I don’t want Kiibo to have to deal with you when you’re sick *and* dealing with muscle cramps just because you slept on the floor.”

“Fine, fine,” Kokichi sighs. “So...”

“On the count of three...” Kaito puts his palm down flat. “One...two... *three!*”

“Rock! Paper! Scissors!” They both slap their palms with fisted hands as they decide what to pick first. Kaito ends up making his playing hand flat, mimicking a piece of paper. He pauses before awkwardly realising he’s going to have to call through the door to say what he’s picked. “I, ah, picked paper by the way!”

“Oh. Well I picked scissors,” Kokichi responds.

Kaito blanches, choking on a yell of disbelief before sighing. He supposes the chances of him losing were fifty percent. Still, his pride yells at him to not lose the next game.

Uh oh. He’s starting to feel a little competitive.

“Rock! Paper! Scissors!” Kaito grins smugly to himself as he plays paper again.

The good old play the same as the previous round tactic. Surely Kokichi wouldn’t have picked scissors again!

“Paper!” Kaito announces proudly before Kokichi can even get a word in edgeways.

“R-Really?” Kokichi mumbles through the door. Kaito pumps a fist. If he sounds that surprised then that must mean he picked rock, right?! “...scissors.”

What?!

Kaito’s head drops in defeat. If it’s best of three then he’s already lost and as much as he suddenly has the urge to play until he wins, he needs to be the responsible one and remind Kokichi to go to sleep.

“We can still play three games, you know?” Kokichi points out quietly. “We don’t have to stop right now.”

...one more game won’t hurt.

“Okay then, one more game,” Kaito says and he hopes he doesn’t sound too pleased. He’s surprised at how much fun he’s having. He thought playing Rock, Paper, Scissors with someone who is in an entirely different room would be infuriating but this is actually kind of relaxing. It’s like a breath of fresh air.

He hears Kokichi mumble out a small Rock, Paper, Scissors to himself in his bedroom, his voice croaky and heavy with sleep. Hearing him makes Kaito forget to say the words himself. He does, however, half-heartedly hit his palm during the appropriate beats.

As much as he’s been ranting and raving on about Tsumugi’s motive...it’s not actually been all that successful, has it? Kaito broke the arcade machine before it could actually do any damage. Maki destroyed the videos and most likely stopped the Monokubs from sharing the secrets. Hell, even Kokichi catching Despair Disease hasn’t been all that bad. Well, Kokichi is still ill and despite the tiny heart attack Kaito had when Tsumugi thrust a bottle of poison into his hands, Kokichi hasn’t actually suffered too much. In fact, it seems like Kiibo’s the one who has suffered the most and Kaito hardly thinks that losing a thousand games of Rock, Paper, Scissors is enough to ruin someone’s life.

The lack of food has sucked but it’s not become too much of a problem. If he’s being brutally honest, for the motive being called the Ultimate Motive, it’s actually kind of sucked. That’s not an

invitation for Tsumugi to make it worse though. Fuck no. She can stay in her room and sulk for eternity for all Kaito cares. The Monokubs have been absolutely useless too.

It just feels like Tsumugi has set herself up to fail at this point. She tried to throw too much at everyone and it backfired. Kaito will have to thank Maki for keeping a strict eye on things once all of this is over. Things would probably be a lot worse right now if she wasn't around.

...which makes him think about the games he can't remember. He's not resentful towards Maki for helping everyone so late. She had her own issues to deal with! However, a teeny tiny part of him just kind of wishes that...those games never happened. He hated watching Angie and Gonta play through their minigames.

It does make him wonder how the minigames were made in the first place. How did the Monokubs know what happened during the other games? Tsumugi implied that she only remembers the previous game so...have the Monokubs always been around? Or is there some sort of file they have access to that tells them what happened? He doesn't know and quite frankly doesn't really care either at this point.

He looks down at his hand silently, eyes glazed over in deep thought. He supposes if there's one thing to worry about right now, it's the time limit. Now that Maki's out of commission...

There's no point worrying about something that hasn't happened yet. In fact, the Monokubs aren't even going to get the chance to attack us with their Exisals because we're all gonna be out of here soon!

He clenches his fist before keeping it that way so that it acts like a rock. Whoops, he's been so deep in thought that he almost forgot he was in the middle of a game. Kaito blinks as he returns to reality.

"Momota?" Kokichi calls cautiously through the door.

"I'm here, I'm here," Kaito says. "Did you say something?"

"I said I picked scissors," Kokichi tells him. Oh? Picking the same option three times in a row? What a play.

Kaito looks down at his clenched fist and realises that his rock beats scissors. He silently pumps a fist, pleased that he's actually won. Sure, the victory is sort of meaningless since Kokichi has technically won the entire round but he's won a game!

He's about to announce his victory when something stops him.

...Kokichi has been one of the few people here who has actually somewhat suffered because of Tsumugi's shitty motive. I suppose he kind of deserves as many wins as he can...tch, I can't believe I'm doing this.

Kaito smiles quietly to himself as he relaxes his hand flat, chuckling bashfully as he says, "aw man, I picked paper again! Guess we both had the same idea, huh?"

"...oh! So I won all three games?" Kokichi asks. "Nishishi, I guess you can call me the Rock, Paper, Scissors Champion!"

"I am not calling you that," Kaito responds with a snort. Maybe if Kokichi wasn't so ill then he'd sound more excited. The leader does sound pleased with his victory though so Kaito chalks that up as a win.

“Really?” Kaito can hear the pout in Kokichi’s voice. “*Boooooo.*”

“Yeah, yeah, I suck,” Kaito chortles. “Now go back to bed. Even Rock, Paper, Scissors Champions need to sleep, you know?”

Kokichi gasps gleefully before going back to giggling. “Who would’ve thought Momota-chan was such a softie.”

“I am *not* a softie,” Kaito huffs.

“Ah...then what are you?” Kokichi asks.

Before Kaito can answer, his mood instantly plummets as he notices an Exisal by the door. He swears under his breath and says, “Ouma, I just need to check on something. Don’t open your door, okay?”

“Okay?” Kokichi sounds concerned. “Is there something wrong?”

“Nothing for you to worry about,” he responds briskly and rushes down the steps before Kokichi can distract him any longer.

He’s not that surprised to see that the blue Exisal is back again. It’s *always* the blue Exisal that turns up to bother him. He is surprised when Monokid hops out of his Exisal and enters the dormitory however. Oh. This is new.

“What the hell do you-”

“Hey, you’re the asshole who broke the arcade machine, right?” Monokid asks. He sounds furious. “Do you know how much effort was put into making that? Because I don’t, I made Monodam do my share of the work.”

“Then why are *you* so pissed off?!”

“Because!” Monokid huffs loudly. “Every time we tried to do something today, Little Miss Assassin stopped us!” His smile turns sinister. “Although it looks like she’s no longer an issue-”

“Well *I’ve* taken over from her!” Kaito responds and pulls the knife from his pocket to show that he’s not messing around. Monokid doesn’t need to know that he feels extremely uncomfortable holding the blade in his hand. “So as far as I’m concerned, you and your shitty siblings are no longer a threat!”

“Oh really?” Monokid snorts noisily. “You know what, when the time limit is up I’m coming after you first! I’ll tear you apart limb by limb-”

“Oh yeah?” Kaito challenges. “Well we’re not gonna be here by the time the time limit ends so-”

“Do you really think we’re just gonna let you leave?” Monokid responds. “Fuck no! Just because there’s not an audience watching anymore doesn’t mean we’re not gonna go all out!”

Wait. Hold on. Something about what he just said doesn’t make any sense.

“Hah! I bet you’re shitting yourself thinking about what I’m gonna do to you,” Monokid continues cruelly. “Let me tell you, what I have planned isn’t gonna be pretty-”

They both jump as they both hear a sudden slam. Kaito looks around with a baffled look on his face as he looks for the source of the noise. He puts a hand on his hip as he peers outside. The

other Exisals are near the entrance but since they're standing still, it's unlikely that one of them made the noise.

"Who the fuck interrupted me?" Monokid angrily snarls. "I'll tear their guts out if they-"

Another slam echoes around the room. Kaito realises that it's the sound of something hitting heavily against a door, almost as if someone is...trying to kick down their door. He looks around, eyeing up all the doors for any signs of movement.

"Okay, now I'm getting pissed!" Monokid yells. "If I get interrupted one more time I'll-"

Instead of a slam, this time the sound of wood splintering into pieces is heard. Kaito watches with wide eyes as he spots Maki's foot kick through her door over and over, creating a huge hole. What is she *doing*?!

"Harukawa?" Kaito calls out apprehensively.

He sees Maki stop and for a moment, it's silent. Even Monokid finally shuts his mouth as he spots Maki. Something doesn't feel right. Maki isn't saying anything. Kaito thinks about calling out her name again when Monokid beats him to it.

"Hey, Little Miss Assassin! Do you want to tell us what the hell you think you're playing at kidnapping the mastermind?!" Monokid shouts. "Because-"

He was right to feel apprehensive. As soon as Maki spots Monokid, all hell breaks loose. Kaito shudders as he sees Maki glare Monokid down through her bedroom door, her eyes shining a dangerous red. She bursts through her door, causing wood and debris to fly everywhere and Kaito feels his jaw drop as she leaps from the balcony with the reflexes of a professional gymnast.

The sound of a knife flying through the air catches his attention and he hears it hit its target before he sees where it actually went. He gawks at Monokid as he falls to the floor, a knife directly between his eyes.

Huh?! What's brought this on? I thought Maki was supposed to be sick!

"M-Monokid!" Monophanie is so loud that Kaito can hear her from inside of the dormitory. However, since he can, Maki can too. She kicks the doors open with a swift flick of her leg and everything happens at once.

Kaito watches in a mixture of fear and awe as Maki pulls out another knife and dives towards the Exisals, her movements precise and perfect as she flicks her wrist and takes out an unprotected Monotaro. She then jumps and lands heavily on a lever near the bottom of the pink Exisal, causing it to spring open and reveal Monophanie sitting inside.

Maki's eyes flash murderously as Monophanie shrieks, reaching forward to close her Exisal. Maki, however, whilst in *mid fucking air*, throws yet another knife and Monophanie is taken out just like that.

Holy shit...holy fucking shit. She really is the Ultimate Assassin!

"H-Hey!" Monosuke starts to fire relentlessly at Maki, who is perched on top of the pink Exisal silently. Kaito notices that she's still got his jacket on over her shoulders and it splays out behind her as she makes an impressive leap towards the yellow Exisal. Monosuke ends up firing heavily at the pink Exisal. Smoke starts to pour from it.

“Momota?” Kaito notices Kokichi poke his head around his door. “What’s going on?”

“Harukawa is an absolute *machine*,” Kaito tells him uselessly before shaking his head. “Hold on, I don’t think it’s safe for you to be out here.”

Monosuke yells as Maki manages to open his Exisal. When he jumps out of it and tries to escape, she puts a swift end to his escape with a simple throw of her knife. She turns her attention to the final Exisal and flexes her hands. Even with her back turned to Kaito, he can’t help but think how cool she looks.

“Is that...Harukawa?” Kokichi asks, narrowing his eyes. “And she’s...”

“She’s taking out all of the Monokubs,” Kaito breathlessly says. “Just like that.”

Monodam doesn’t last very long. Even as he fires countless bullets at Maki, she dodges them with frightening precision and punches the lever to open up his Exisal. Monodam doesn’t even try to escape when Maki reaches him, probably realising that escape is futile. Maki launches him from the Exisal and he ends up becoming a pile of nuts and bolts on the floor.

Then, Maki goes still, breathing heavily with a knife in each hand.

Kokichi uses his bedroom door as a shield as he looks at Maki with wide eyes. “It didn’t even take her a minute to destroy them all...”

Kaito ends up cheering, pumping a fist as he calls out to her. “Holy shit, Harukawa! That was really something-”

He feels a sharp sting stretch across his cheek before hearing the sound of a knife lodging into a wall. Kaito abruptly stops celebrating as he feels something wet trickle down his face. He lifts a finger up and presses it against his cheek carefully. When he examines his finger, he sees blood.

“Eh?” Kaito slowly turns his head and checks behind him. There’s a knife lodged in the wall. But...why? He turns back to look at Maki and it feels like his blood has turned to ice as he spots her glaring at him, looking down at him from on top of the green Exisal as if he’s her next target.

Then he realises. *He is.*

“Harukawa?” Kaito stumbles back as she makes her way back into the dormitory, unsheathing yet another knife from her belt. Her eyes follow his every movement. As she stalks towards him, Kaito feels a flurry of emotions hit him at once. Fear. Anxiety. Dread. Desperation. Confusion.

The need to run as fast as he can.

Whoever is hunting him down is not Maki, he decides. This is someone completely different. They may look like Maki, they may have her face but fuck, this isn’t the Maki he knows.

“Haru-” Kaito yelps as a knife hurtles towards him. He barely manages to dodge. It ends up catching his arm. This, however, displeases Maki enough that her entire posture changes. A large shadow falls over her face and the only thing Kaito can make out are her large red eyes.

He hears Kokichi suck in a sharp breath from his bedroom door, which he hides behind. Only his head is poking out. Thankfully, he doesn’t say anything but he watches with fear in his eyes.

She’s on top of him before he can even blink. She takes his legs out by kicking them with unrivalled speed and he lands heavily on his back, forcing all of the air out of his lungs. As he

splutters and gasps for air, she pins him down by stomping down hard on his stomach, causing him to cry out.

I don't understand. Why is she...why is she hurting me?

Kaito watches as a droplet of sweat trickles down Maki's face and everything suddenly clicks. Despair Disease. It doesn't take a genius to figure out what sort of strain she has.

"H-Harukawa, wait!" Kaito cries out as she tries to lodge a knife into his eye. Maki does not wait. Kaito barely moves his head out of the way in time and flinches as the knife is lodged into the ground.

He stares at the blade jutting out of the concrete right by his head. As he does this, Maki growls and prepares to take him out with her other knife. She looks down at him intensely and Kaito wonders if she's going to be the last thing he sees before he dies. It causes a brand new fear to bubble up inside of him, a fear he has never felt before.

A lump grows in his throat as Maki spins the knife around in her hand. He can't die here! He can't! He doesn't want to die. He doesn't. He has so much he still needs to do. He has people he needs to save. He-

"Hey!"

Kaito suddenly feels a lot lighter as Maki suddenly springs from him. Kaito gasps in air greedily as he sits up, clutching at his chest. He can feel his heart hammer against his ribs frantically, as if it's trying to escape. It takes a second for it to click that there must be a reason why Maki isn't on top of him anymore. Kaito continues to grasp at his chest as he tries to find her, eyes flickering around the dormitory manically.

He spots her easily. There is, after all, only one other person who is awake right now.

Kokichi must've slammed his bedroom door shut as soon as he shouted but Maki easily yanks it open and drags him out by the front of his scarf. Somehow, Kaito feels like his heart is starting to beat impossibly faster. He feels *sick*. God, he feels *so* sick as Maki throws Kokichi from the balcony. He lands near Kaito, yelping as he lands heavily on the floor.

Kaito doesn't know whose name to call out as Maki jumps after him, landing on her own two feet in a crouched position. He scrambles towards Kokichi, who tries to drag himself backwards with his hands and feet.

"Harukawa, that's *enough!*" Kaito bellows as Maki pulls out one final knife. Even though he knows she can't hear him, that the Maki he believes in isn't the one listening to him, he dares to hope that maybe he can make her see sense.

Kokichi stays behind him, one of his trembling hands on Kaito's shoulder as he pokes his head around Kaito's arm to keep an eye on Maki. They were literally playing Rock, Paper, Scissors only minutes ago. Now they're face to face with a bloodthirsty assassin.

Maki eyes the both of them up with equal malice. She looks like she's deciding what she should do. She's probably figuring out which one of them she's going to take out first.

From the corner of Kaito's eye, he sees a door opening slowly and he calls out to whoever is about to leave their room. *"Don't come out here!"*

"But Tenko thought she heard fighting," Tenko murmurs. She does, however, close her door.

When Maki snaps her head in the direction towards Tenko's room, Kaito quickly steals back her attention by shouting. "Hey!"

It does the trick. Maki goes back to storming towards him and Kokichi.

"This is for everyone who is awake!" Kaito shouts as he scoots himself and Kokichi backwards. "Under no circumstances do any of you come out, *got it?!*"

He's not sure how many people have been woken up by Maki's fighting but what Kaito has noticed is that as soon as she notices someone, she wants to kill them. Which, of course, is a huge fucking problem for him since he's literally right in front of Maki. He continues to crawl backwards until he hits a wall. His eyes go wide as he realises that both him and Kokichi have hit a dead end.

What does he do? What does he do?! He can't fight her! Any sudden movement and he'll end up with a knife in his chest. He feels a light layer of perspiration break out over his skin. He's not sure if he's sweating because he's nervous or because of the heat that is radiating from Kokichi, who is still behind him.

Korekiyo might as well come out and give him a full blown interview since Kaito is very much looking death in the eye right now and *boy* is she *scary*. Fuck, he needs to get this situation under control. He just doesn't know how. His mind completely blanks as Maki gets too close for comfort.

"Harukawa, you don't have to do this," Kaito says and he hopes to anyone listening that Maki in turn will listen. "Harukawa, *please*."

She's sick, he knows she's sick. He knows she's sick with Despair Disease and now she's going to kill him. She's going to kill him and then she's going to kill Kokichi and then she's probably going to kill everyone else too.

It's so unfair. He didn't think things were going to turn out like this. He grits his teeth as Maki snatches up the front of his shirt and drags him to his feet, her knife ready in her hand. He thinks about pushing her, about pleading with her. He's at a complete loss. He supposes he could fight her but he doesn't want to hurt her. He doesn't.

Maki stares at him silently before he feels a pain he's never felt before. She doesn't kill him, to his surprise, but she does lodge a knife through his hand and into the wall behind him, keeping him trapped. Kaito doesn't even have time to scream before he realises that he's pinned. He instead looks at his hand and the knife deep inside of it and...stares. It hurts, it hurts *so* much but it's like he's not even in his own body anymore. All he can do is gape at the blade in his hand.

Then, from the corner of his eye, he spots Maki move onto Kokichi, who has probably figured out by now that running is not an option. She picks him up by the neck and the same brand new fear he felt before returns. He hears Kokichi try to say something but all the leader can do is gasp as Maki squeezes and squeezes and *squeezes*.

Kokichi is too sick to fight back, Kaito realises. It's ironic. Maki is more than capable of doing enough fighting for the both of them. The assassin peers up at Kokichi wordlessly and perhaps the leader gasps one too many times. Maki's glare darkens and before anyone can react, Maki throws him through the glass dormitory door.

It's like time stops. Kaito feels his breath halt as he watches Kokichi fall through the glass. He barely hears the door shatter. He barely hears Kokichi land on the floor heavily. He barely hears

himself scream at Maki to stop as she steps through the shattered door frame, walking towards Kokichi's body as if it's her personal mission to kill him.

Kokichi doesn't get up. He doesn't even so much as twitch as Maki gets closer and closer to him.

All Kaito can hear is the sound of his blood pumping desperately in his ears. He can hear it *roaring*. His legs feel like jelly and if it wasn't for the knife in his hand, he thinks he would've fallen to his knees by now.

"Harukawa...Harukawa," Kaito calls urgently. She continues to keep her back on him as she plucks Kokichi up from the glass and dangles him from her hand like a ragdoll. It hits Kaito that Kokichi *does* look like a ragdoll, limp and unmoving.

He sees her thumb press around Kokichi's neck to search for a pulse. Kokichi doesn't even flinch, his head flopped forward and his limbs slack.

...she's killed him.

"Harukawa!" Kaito continues frantically. He wants her to let him go. He doesn't like this, he doesn't like this at all. He feels sick. He's going to throw up. He wasn't expecting this to happen. "Harukawa, fucking listen to me!"

She ignores him. She's far too interested in searching for a pulse that Kaito doesn't even think exists anymore.

"Maki!"

She finally turns around to face him and Kaito swallows as he's greeted with a face devoid of emotion. Maki looks at him before dropping Kokichi carelessly to the floor. Kaito watches as not even a finger twitches as Kokichi is dropped back into the glass. He's so caught up in staring at Kokichi that he almost misses Maki slowly stalk back towards him with nothing but murderous intent in her eyes.

Maki steps back through the door frame and Kaito winces when she steps on a piece of glass, causing it to crack loudly. This is it. This is fucking it, isn't it?

He squeezes his eyes shut as he desperately tries to swallow down the thick lump in his throat. His eyes are burning with unshed tears, he realises. There are so many words sitting right on the tip of his tongue but he doesn't know what to say. He feels like he's paralysed with fear.

It takes him a couple of seconds to register that he's struggling to breathe. All he can concentrate on is his heart throbbing loudly in his chest. It feels like it's trying to escape. Fuck, he's never felt so scared in his life. Is this because he's face to face with the Ultimate Assassin herself? He pities all of her previous victims.

"Harukawa, this isn't you," he mumbles out shakily. He still has his eyes shut. He thinks that if he opens them then he won't be able to speak. "Harukawa, please. I thought you wanted to leave this place together? You've been keeping everyone safe the entire time here. You've been keeping me safe. This isn't what you want."

A light breeze hits his cheekbones and he realises that she's positioning her arm. Ah. She can't hear him. Maki can't hear him.

...I'm going to die, aren't I?

He braces himself and waits for impact.

...and waits...

...and waits just a little longer...

...hold on a second.

He hears a loud yell and Kaito cracks open his eyes slowly. He sees that Maki is no longer looking at him but is instead...on the floor? Kaito blinks as he tries to get his eyesight to focus. His eyes roll as a sudden movement catches his attention.

Kaito spots Tenko pinning Maki down, her face surprisingly serious as she holds Maki's arms tightly. The assassin thrashes angrily on the floor, growling and hissing as she tries to pull herself back up.

"Chabashira?!" Kaito splutters. "I thought I told you to-"

"How could you expect Tenko to stay in her room?!" Tenko fires back impatiently. She grunts as Maki tries to take out her legs. Tenko barely manages to keep her pinned down. "Especially after hearing such a loud crash!"

Kaito turns his attention back to the door, back to Kokichi on the floor. He still isn't moving.

"I...I need to see if he's okay," Kaito murmurs.

"Huh?" Tenko raises an eyebrow before paling drastically as she finally notices Kokichi in the midst of all the glass. "W-What *happened?!?*"

Maki continues to fight desperately in Tenko's hold, her fingers twitching as if searching for a knife.

"Momota, your hand!" Tenko gasps, only realising now that there's a very large knife stuck in it. "Did Harukawa do that?"

"Of course she did!" Kaito snaps. He tries to hype himself up as he realises he's going to have to yank the knife from his hand if he wants to free himself. Oh fuck. This is going to hurt so *bad*.

Tenko looks like she's going to yell at him for snapping before Maki starts to thrash a little too violently. The aikido master yelps as she doubles down on keeping her pinned, her face contorting with determination.

Kaito takes a deep breath as he flexes his free hand before wrapping it around the knife's handle. This is going to hurt. This is going to hurt so, *so* much. However, he can't focus on that right now. He needs to free himself so he can make sure that Maki actually hasn't killed Kokichi.

On the count of three, spaceman. One. Two. Three.

Kaito bites down hard on his lip, swallowing down a muffled shriek of pain as he tugs the knife out in one swift pull. He was right, the pain hurts so much. He feels blood trickle between his teeth as he realises he bit down on his lip a little too hard. However, there's much more blood pouring from his hand at the moment, dripping onto the floor loudly and creating a mess.

Even Tenko gasps as she watches him drop the knife that was in his hand onto the floor uselessly. "Momota-"

"I'm fine," he hisses, clutching his hand to his chest and bloodying his shirt.

"That's obviously a lie!" Tenko insists. She looks annoyed as Maki tries to elbow her. "Stop moving!"

The aikido master doesn't stop him as he stumbles out of the dormitory, cradling his hand tightly as he kicks his way through the glass. Tenko probably also wants to know if Kokichi is okay too.

"Ouma," Kaito calls out breathlessly as he kicks a particularly large piece of glass out of the way. He sees that Kokichi is on his back in the middle of all of the glass and it makes him feel faint. He drops to his knees and with his free hand, goes to shake the leader's shoulder carefully. "*Ouma.*"

He's dead, isn't he? He's fucking dead. He looks dead. Holy shit, he's dead.

The moment his hand touches Kokichi's shoulder, the leader's eyes crack open ever so slightly. Kaito almost screams since he was so convinced that Kokichi was dead that it feels like a corpse is currently looking at him.

"...is she gone?" Kokichi asks quietly.

...the little fucker. He was playing dead.

"I thought you were *dead*," Kaito tells him. He's not sure if he wants to punch the leader or hug him.

"I..." Kokichi's eyes flicker over to Kaito quietly. He rests a hand on his stomach as he sucks in a couple of deep breaths. "I trusted that she wouldn't kill me if she thought I was dead."

"Oh my god..." Kaito's shoulders slump as he laughs helplessly. "You're an asshole, you know that?"

"Hah?"

"I really fucking thought that..." Kaito breathes heavily through his nose before sighing. "You scared me."

"Oh..." Kokichi pauses. "I didn't mean to. Nishishi, I guess I'm just that good of an actor, huh?"

Kaito stares at him dryly before examining the floor. "Hey, you probably shouldn't be lying in all this glass. You're not hurt, are you?"

"...I think I have a couple of scratches," Kokichi admits. He winces as he tries to prop himself up with his elbows. "Nothing, um, serious though."

"Good. That's good." Kaito watches sympathetically as Kokichi struggles to even sit himself up properly. He puts his uninjured hand on his lower back and carefully helps him into a sitting position. Kokichi mumbles out a quiet thanks before digging his palms into his eyes. "Hey, you okay?"

"Really fucking dizzy," Kokichi mumbles. When he lowers his hands, Kokichi right away notices the very bloody and very painful hole in Kaito's hand. He stares at it silently, a crease growing between his brows. "Momota, *your hand.*"

"Don't worry about it, it doesn't even hurt," Kaito lies before feeling rather shitty doing so. Kokichi's face relaxes but he continues to look at Kaito's hand like he knows deep down that Kaito

should at least be feeling some sort of discomfort. “Hey, can you stand?”

“I...” Kokichi pulls a face as he checks his surroundings. Kaito realises that Kokichi isn’t even wearing any shoes. It’s a brutal reminder that Maki really did go after them just like that. A droplet of sweat runs down his face. “Ah...”

Clearly the answer is no. Kaito sighs as he ignores the throb of pain his hand lets out. “Hold on to me, okay?”

“Huh?”

“I’ll carry you out of here,” Kaito says. “So just put your arms around my neck and I’ll lift you up.”

“But your hand-”

“I already told you that I’m fine,” Kaito reassures him. “I’m not gonna hurt myself picking you up, okay?”

“...right.”

Kokichi momentarily hesitates before wrapping his arms around Kaito’s neck. Kaito uses his good hand, which is ironically the hand Kirumi wrapped earlier, to hold Kokichi’s waist. He uses the arm on his more injured side to hook under his legs, dangling his hand so that too much pressure isn’t applied to it.

Kaito grits his teeth as he realises that this is probably going to take a while, especially since he’s going to have to stand up with a person in his arms. However, with how tightly Kokichi is clinging onto him, he thinks that standing won’t be too difficult as long as he doesn’t aggravate any of his wounds.

He’s crouched down ready to stand when a sudden blinding light catches him off guard. Kokichi’s eyes go wide before he buries his face into Kaito’s neck due to how bright the light is, especially compared to the darkness of the night. Kaito lasts only a couple of seconds gawping at it before he hides his face in Kokichi’s hair.

What the hell? What is this?

It takes a couple of seconds for everything to click. Kaito’s head snaps up as he looks at where the light is actually at. It’s near the bottom of the courtyard, near the hangar where the grey slab should be-

The grey slab isn’t there anymore. It’s been replaced by the light.

“What...what the heck is that?” Tenko asks as she stumbles out of the dormitory with a limp Maki in her arms. Ah, she must’ve knocked her out when he wasn’t paying attention.

“I don’t know,” Kaito murmurs. He can’t help but be entranced by the light. It looks so...inviting. He wants to get closer to it, to touch it.

“Kaito!”

A voice he doesn’t recognise calls out his name. He looks over his shoulder towards the school and spots a girl with blond hair running towards him, waving one of her hands to catch his attention. Behind her is a guy with green hair. He looks like he’s struggling to keep up with the blond.

...huh? Those two people look kind of familiar...

“Kaede, slow down!” The green haired guy calls after the blond. There is, however, a soft smile on his face as he follows her down the stone path.

The blond, apparently whose name is Kaede, reaches Tenko first and the aikido master squeaks as Kaede throws her arms around her tightly, embracing her with a warm hug. Kaito spots Tenko’s face turn bright red.

“H-Hello!” Tenko yelps nervously. “Um...d-does Tenko know you?”

“Ah...” Kaede pulls away with a bashful laugh. “Sorry, I’ve just really...” She smiles tightly, as if suddenly holding back tears. “I’ve just really missed you.”

“Huh?!” Tenko blinks before starting to panic. “Ah, Tenko is really sorry but she doesn’t think she remembers you! Um, um! Tenko will try her very best to remember who you are though so please don’t cry!”

“Please don’t worry! I’m just...” Kaede laughs wetly as she wipes her eyes. “I’m really overwhelmed right now.”

The green haired guy sighs as he finally reaches the group, resting his hands on his knees. “You’re far too fast, Kaede.”

“Ah, sorry Rantaro!” Kaede smiles sympathetically. “I just really wanted to see everyone.”

“I know,” Rantaro sighs. He looks at Kaito and Kokichi with a nervous smile.

Kaito yelps as he’s suddenly pulled into a sudden hug and he feels Kokichi freeze in his arms. Kaede sniffs as she pulls them both close, burying her face into Kaito’s free shoulder. “You’re both okay...”

“Why wouldn’t we be?” Kaito counters anxiously. He notices Kokichi peering up at Kaede curiously.

“We saw what happened with Harukawa,” Kaede tells him. She grimaces. “I’m, ah, sorry it took so long to get the exit fixed. Iruma tried her best to work as quickly as she could.”

“The exit is fixed?” Kaito asks. It’s suddenly the only thing he can concentrate on. He feels like a giddy child.

Kaede nods cheerfully. “Yep! It’s right where the light is!”

Kaito looks back at the light longingly. “I knew it...I knew that the exit would be fixed in time!”

Kaede pumps her fists. “And if you go through it, it should fix your hands! I mean, I was poisoned when I left my game and since I’m clearly fine I think leaving and re-entering the simulation fixes you right up!”

“W-What do you mean you were *poisoned*?!” Tenko asks incredulously.

“It’s, ah, a very long story,” Kaede admits with a giggle. She fiddles with the straps of her backpack before turning to Rantaro. “Hey, so, can you gather everyone in the dormitory and tell them to gather in the gym? I think it’s for the best if we get everyone up to date as soon as possible-”

“You want everyone to gather in the gym?” Kaito asks. “But...the exit is right over there! Shouldn’t we all just leave?”

“...um...” Kaede and Rantaro share the same nervous look. “Kaito, there’s, um, there’s a lot of things you don’t know right now.”

“I think it’s for the best that you, Ouma and Harukawa leave so you all get fixed up,” Rantaro says. “But...” He rubs the back of his neck awkwardly. “...there’s really no easy way of putting this.”

“What’s wrong?” Tenko asks. “We can leave, right?”

“Yeah, you can all leave,” Kaede answers quickly. She chews on her lip before squeezing her bag straps tightly. “But things are really, *really* complicated outside of the simulation.”

“...how complicated?” Kokichi asks and Kaito almost jumps since he’s been so quiet.

Kaede looks at him sympathetically. “...it might be easier if you all see for yourselves.”

“We’re not going to be walking head first into danger, right?” Kaito asks. “Because if that’s the case-”

“No! There’s nothing dangerous outside of the simulation!” Kaede insists. “Things are just...super complicated. In fact...” She looks at Kaito with a firm look of determination. “Some of us were hoping you’d be able to help, Kaito.”

“*Me?!?*”

Kaede nods. “Yes, you. I’ll explain everything to you later since getting you all fixed up is my number one priority.” She pumps her fists. “I think everyone outside of the simulation is currently logging back in so I don’t think there’s going to be many of us outside. Don’t worry, I’ll be right by your side though!”

“Everyone is...coming back *in*?” Kokichi tilts his head to the side.

Kaede looks horribly nervous as she guides the group towards the light, leaving Rantaro to deal with everyone else.

Kaito almost stumbles as he stands up with Kokichi in his arms but he finds that once he’s on his feet, he doesn’t feel too bad. Still, there’s this nagging feeling at the back of his head as he walks towards the exit a little too easily. Even Kokichi seems apprehensive as he curls himself a little tighter against his chest. Tenko is walking next to them with Maki slumped over her back.

As the small group nears the light, Kaito finds himself coming to a halt. He looks up at it silently, captured by the tranquillity of the inviting light. He wants to shove his entire hand into it. He wants to dive into it head first.

“This is the exit?” Tenko asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Yep, you just have to step into the light and you’ll wake up outside of the simulation,” Kaede reassures her. She puts her hand into the light before pulling it out, showing that nothing bad will happen if you touch it. “See, there’s absolutely nothing to be scared about!”

“...Tenko just didn’t expect this,” Tenko admits as she nears the light first. She readjusts Maki on her back and swallows. “So...Tenko just has to step into the light, right?”

Kaede hums happily. “Yep!”

“Right...” Tenko takes a deep breath before taking a step forward. She and Maki disappear completely.

Kaito waits a couple of seconds before saying, “...are they gone?”

“They should be,” Kaede says. She waits to the side, clearly wanting Kaito and Kokichi to step through the hole first. Her smile turns sympathetic. “Hey, neither of you are nervous, right? I know it looks kinda strange but I promise that neither of you will feel a thing!”

“It’s just...” Kokichi leans forward and hesitantly dips his fingers into the light. As soon as he does so, he jerks his hand away as if he’s been burnt. “Are we allowed to go into it?”

“Huh?” Kaede tilts her head. “What do you mean?”

“We just...walked up to the exit just like that,” Kokichi says. He looks up at Kaito with a frown before looking back at Kaede. “After everything, this just feels a little too easy.”

“I get what you mean,” Kaito agrees quietly before clearing his throat. “But we can’t let fear hold us back! We’ve gotta take advantage of the fact we can leave so easily!”

“...even so,” Kokichi murmurs as he quietly strokes the light again with his fingers. He shudders but he doesn’t pull his hand away this time. “...this feels wrong.”

Even though he’s sick with a disease that’s forcing him to be more trusting, he’s still worried? If he’s that stressed then...perhaps he’s onto something. Even Kaede has all but said that there’s something seriously wrong. Surely she’s just overreacting, right? Everyone hasn’t been put through hell and back just to end up staying here...right?

“Don’t worry, man! I’m sure everything is gonna be fine!” Kaito insists. He squeezes Kokichi’s waist reassuringly. “In fact, I’ll make sure that everything is fine! You’ve got nothing to worry about since the Luminary of the Stars has everything handled!”

“...ah, right,” Kokichi murmurs. He swallows before craning his neck up to examine the light.

“I think Kaito is right,” Kaede suddenly says. “I’m sure everything is going to be fine, Ouma. I’m sorry if I’ve worried you.” She smiles at him bashfully. “I’m just a little stressed myself, that’s all. Please don’t let my words put you off leaving.”

“...so everything is going to be okay?” Kokichi asks. He wrinkles his nose as he dips his hand in even further. “Hey, this kind of tickles.”

“It feels nice, right?” Kaede says. She delicately tickles the light with her fingers.

Kaito steels himself as he stands face to face with the exit that he’s been waiting quite some time for. Shouldn’t he be feeling more excited? He’s here. He’s finally here, standing right in front of the light with Kokichi in his arms.

Kaede gestures for him to take a step forward.

So, Kaito takes a deep breath and moves one foot in front of the other. He feels Kokichi wrap his arms even tighter around his neck as he submerges them both into the light.

Kokichi is right. The light does tickle.

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Thank you for playing Danganronpa V3: Killing Harmony

Log out: Successful

Interlude - Part 1

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait! I've just been a little busy lately :)

Thank you to everyone who has left a kudo or comment on this fic! It really means a lot! Sorry if there are any mistakes!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

Have a nice day!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nothing.

There's no light to reach out towards. There are no sounds to listen to.

There's no tangible form to latch onto.

There...are suddenly voices to listen to.

"...ah, they're both waking up..."

"...nyeh, what should we do?"

"...get them out, of course..."

Where am I?

A loud hissing noise fills the room and a pair of eyes blink rapidly as they adjust to a sudden brand new light. Everything blurs together. A hand reaches out.

"Ah!"

Kaede lurches forward, her legs like jelly as she springs to life. She hears a quiet gasp as she falls forward, only for a pair of hands to catch her shoulders. She squeezes her eyes shut as the world spins. She doesn't think she's ever felt so weak in her life. Her legs scramble desperately as she tries to find something solid to stand on.

"Akamatsu, please calm down!"

She freezes as a familiar voice fills her ears. As she's lowered to the floor, Kaede carefully opens her eyes and slowly starts to blink away all of the fog. The pair of hands on her shoulders belong to...

"*Kiibo?*" Kaede asks breathlessly before wincing as she hears how rough she sounds. It feels like someone has rubbed down her throat with sandpaper.

Kiibo looks down at her patiently, a purposefully neutral look on his face. "Hello, Akamatsu."

...seriously, where am I? The last thing I remember is...

A rocket flying over her head. Kaede's eyes go wide and she gasps as she tries to stand up, only to slam into Kiibo's chest and almost knock the two of them to the ground. That's right, she was in the trial room with Rantaro and Kaito and Tsumugi and...

Monokuma punished both Kaito and Tsumugi! I'm not sure what happened to Tsumugi but Kaito ended up in a rocket, right? All that I remember is feeling sick because...of the poison in my system.

The pianist's hands tremble as she looks down at them. She notices how pale her skin is, how her nails are longer than usual. She tries to calm herself down but even as she tries to suck in a couple of deep breaths, it's like she's on constant high alert. Did she die? Is she in some sort of purgatory?

Where's Rantaro?

She grits her teeth as she tries to will herself to stand up. Kaede is surprised when Kiibo firmly keeps her kneeling on the floor.

"You're far too weak to be wandering around right now," Kiibo says as he presses his hands down on Kaede's shoulders carefully but firmly. "Please, just rest for a couple of minutes and allow yourself to gather your bearings."

"B-But..." Kaede gasps and puts a hand to her head when the world starts to twirl around violently once more. She feels a tentative hand press against her arm, a hand that clearly doesn't belong to Kiibo as it's much softer. She cracks open an eye and notices a small girl kneeling next to her. She has brown eyes and dark brown hair that reaches just a little past her shoulders.

"I felt the same way when I woke up too," the girl reveals quietly.

"...huh?" Kaede gives up on trying to stand. Instead, maybe she should just focus on figuring out where she is. She slowly opens her other eye and finally takes a good look around.

The room she's in reminds her of something that would be found in some sort of sci-fi film. There are these strange pods around her and to her bewilderment, she swears she sees someone in one that's next to her. When she looks over her shoulder, she sees that she's directly in front of one that looks like it's just been opened. Did she just come out of one?

Her eyes land on a wire and she follows it with her eyes. It's attached to this impressive looking computer, one that looks far too complicated for her to use. She blinks before rubbing her head once more and grimaces when she realises how dirty her hair feels.

Kaede looks back up at Kiibo silently. He's looking down at her almost expectantly, as if he's waiting for her to fire countless questions at him. He continues to hold her patiently, stopping her from standing up and doing serious damage to herself. She's about to say something when a sudden movement from behind Kiibo catches her attention. Kaede looks over the robot's shoulder and notices two more people. One of them has long brown hair that's been tied back lazily whilst the other has black hair that's been tied into a tiny ponytail. Kaede wants to say that she's looking at perhaps one boy and one girl.

They're both looking down at a pod quietly. Kaede watches as the pod, which is almost standing up straight, opens. Due to the pod being at a slight angle, whoever is inside doesn't tumble out. The person in the pod must be much calmer than Kaede as they don't fall out straight away like she had. She spots a hand curling around the air, as if the person inside is experimenting how much

they can move their body at the moment.

Kaede licks her lips and nervously goes back to looking at Kiibo and the girl who is still on the ground next to her. She's so confused right now. Only seconds ago, she was about to die. Well, unless she *is* right and she's currently in purgatory. Kaede, however, doubts that is the case when her body starts to go back to trembling. She feels lightheaded, as if she's one sudden movement away from nose diving onto the floor.

Kaede, despite how groggy she feels, however, has something much more important to focus on. She wants to know where Rantaro is because he was with her right until the very end, right?

It was me and him and a room full of white light. I can't exactly remember but I do recall him holding my hand. He was right by my side.

"...need to find Amami," Kaede mumbles as she once again tries to pull herself to her feet. "I was with him...just a couple of moments ago..."

"You really shouldn't be moving around so much right now," Kiibo says firmly. "And please don't worry about Amami, he's in the process of waking up."

"Huh?" Kaede winces as the edges of her vision start to blur. Ah, perhaps she shouldn't be moving around so much. She goes back to looking at the two unknown people leaning over the recently opened pod.

Is...Rantaro in that pod?

"You're really cold," the girl next to her murmurs before scrambling to her feet and dashing off. She returns with a soft hoodie and Kaede is about to accept it when she notices its design. The hoodie is black and white.

It reminds her too much of Monokuma.

The small girl's brown eyes go wide and she nervously says, "I know the design sucks but I really don't have anything else to offer you other than a blanket-"

"Then I'll take the blanket," Kaede responds roughly.

"...okay then."

Kaede feels a pang of guilt as the girl wordlessly puts the hoodie to one side and ventures off to find a blanket. Thankfully, Kaede notices right away that the blanket is cream coloured and takes it gratefully when the girl returns with it. She's even more grateful when Kiibo helps her drape it over her shoulders.

She hopes Kiibo doesn't mind when she rests her forehead on his shoulder, sighing when she's met with cool metal. Kaede closes her eyes and swallows heavily. She feels a slight headache making itself known.

"Where am I?" Kaede asks, deciding to just cut to the chase. "Did...I die?"

She feels stupid for asking such an absurd question but she really has no idea where she is. It's not like this is the first weird place she's woken up in either. No, she thinks that waking up inside of a locker takes first place, especially since said locker was within a school owned by a murderous teddy bear. Speaking of murderous teddy bears...is Monokuma nearby? It can't be a coincidence that the hoodie offered to her was black and white.

Kaede suddenly bristles as she tries to inch herself away from the girl next to her. Is she working with Monokuma? Why did she have a black and white hoodie? Who is she anyway? Kaede doesn't recognise this girl. She doesn't think she knows anyone with brown eyes and brown hair.

There is, however, something vaguely familiar about her eyes. Whilst her brown hair doesn't ring a bell, the girl's eyes...Kaede swears she's seen them before. Perhaps in a picture? There's something distinct about how the girl barely keeps her eyes open, as if she's constantly on the verge of falling asleep.

"No, you didn't die thankfully," Kiibo responds, causing Kaede to jump. She peers up at him curiously. "You...woke up."

"You're out of the simulation," the girl timidly adds. "You survived."

"I..." Kaede goes back to examining her hands as well as the rest of her body. Her body had been clammy with sweat and paler than the moon when it was full of poison. Now it looks...relatively normal. She's still pale but she's always been pale, especially since she usually spends most of her time inside playing piano. Something bothers her about her fingernails that she can't quite place a finger on. They're a little longer than she usually keeps them and they look...disappointingly plain.

I could've sworn I had nail polish on.

She carefully reaches a hand up and runs it through her hair. It's rather knotted, as if it hasn't been brushed for a while. A couple of strands catch her attention and she pulls a clump of her hair directly in front of her eyes. Her hair is honey blond, right? Then why does her hair look...a completely different shade. Her hair colour doesn't look natural. It's as if her hair has been bleached.

But I'm a natural blond, right?

This is getting so weird. Kaede swallows a growing lump in her throat as a helpless feeling of frustration starts to bubble in her stomach. She's so confused. She's so, so confused.

She hears the two other people in the room murmur to each other. The person in the recently opened pod, who is supposedly Rantaro, has stopped moving. Due to being on the floor, Kaede can't see his face. She wonders what's wrong.

"I...survived? What are you..." Kaede starts to frown. "What are you on about?"

"Do you...not remember what happened before you woke up here?" The girl tilts her head to the side before chewing her lip. "You, um..."

"There was a class trial," Kaede murmurs. She grimaces. "And Kaito, Amami and I found out Shirogane was the mastermind and that...she killed Ouma."

"That's correct," Kiibo says. "Do you also recall Amami figuring out that the simulation you were in has..." Kiibo looks away. "Some sort of glitch?"

"Ah!" Kaede nods furiously and the world around her blurs as if she's trapped inside a snow globe. "That's right!"

Everything clicks together. She remembers the four of them inside of the trial room. She remembers Tsumugi gleefully revealing how she killed Kokichi with no hesitation. She remembers feeling poison running through her veins. She remembers Rantaro slowly piecing together what Kaede thought would've been an impossible mystery. She remembers Kaito giving up his life so

she could leave with Rantaro.

Her eyes sting with mournful tears as she's hit with the guilty realisation that the only reason she's awake right now is because Kaito quite literally gave up his life for her. The rocket flying over her head...Kaito had been inside of it. Monokuma killed him.

"N-Nyeh, please don't cry," the girl murmurs. The person with tied back black hair turns around in alarm when he hears this, his eyes going wide. "Akamatsu, *please* don't cry."

Kaede snuffles and mentally apologises to Kiibo as she dampens his shoulder with tears. She wipes her eyes with the back of her hands roughly. "How do you know who I am?"

She's glad Kiibo is here, that's one familiar face at least. She feels her heartbeat pick up as she realises that Rantaro still hasn't shown his face yet. Why isn't he awake? He's okay, right? And who is the girl next to her? And the guy looking down at her with unrivalled guilt on his face?

"I'm..." The girl hesitates before continuing. "I'm Himiko Yumeno." Kaede's eyes go wide as she realises she knows that name. "I'm-"

"One of the three graduates," Kaede finishes. She wipes her eyes once more and looks up at the guy staring down at her. She points at him with a trembling hand. "So you're...Shuichi Saihara, right? A-And the girl next to you...she's Maki Harukawa!"

But I thought Himiko had red hair? And Shuichi's hair is completely black. I swear his profile picture showed that his hair had some sort of bluish tinge to it. At least Maki's hair colour looks the same-

When Maki looks over her shoulders and shows her face, Kaede spots that instead of red eyes, Maki has dark brown.

...huh? Why does everyone...look different?

"You're correct once again," Kiibo says. Kaede is about to respond when she abruptly snaps her mouth shut. Hold on a second. She thought that only three students had graduated. What the hell is Kiibo doing here? He was in the game with her. He *died*. She had seen his body. Yet here he is, kneeling right in front of her and looking exactly like how he is supposed to unlike everyone else. "Akamatsu, are you okay? You're looking at me rather strangely."

"You're not supposed to be here," Kaede tells him, ignoring how rude she sounds. "You...you never graduated so why are you?"

"That's something I will explain later," Kiibo reassures her. "But right now you need to rest. It's going to be at least a couple of hours before you're going to be strong enough to stand."

"It almost took me an entire day to be able to stand without falling," Himiko adds quietly. "I thought I had been hit with a dizzying spell..." She suddenly purses her lips and looks incredibly frustrated with herself. "But I'm not magic so..."

"I thought..." Kaede's eyes light up as she remembers. "Your profile said that you're the Ultimate Magician-"

"I'm not," Himiko firmly responds and Kaede feels all of the hairs on her arms stand up in alarm due to how adamant Himiko sounds. "I'm not the Ultimate Magician. I never was."

"But-"

“Drop it,” Maki snaps.

Kaede’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise. “Huh?”

“Harukawa,” Shuichi murmurs warningly before clearing his throat. “Kiibo was right when he said that you should rest, Akamatsu. I understand that you’re probably...really confused right now but...”

“I assure you that once you’ve got more of your strength back, I’ll catch both you and Amami up to date with everything,” Kiibo tells her.

“Ah, that’s right! Amami!” Kaede tries to crane her neck up to check the pod he’s in. “Why isn’t he saying anything?!”

“He pretty much just fell back asleep right away,” Maki mutters and crosses her arms tightly. “There’s no need to get hysterical.”

Shuichi lightly elbows Maki with a frown on his face. “Harukawa, *seriously*...”

Maki stares at him with a locked jaw before clicking her tongue impatiently. “Whatever...” Before anyone can stop her, she storms into a nearby room that Kaede didn’t notice until now.

The pianist blinks slowly as Himiko averts her gaze awkwardly. Shuichi simply sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose with an exasperated look on his face. Huh. Did Shuichi and Maki have some sort of argument recently?

“I think everyone reacts differently when waking up,” Shuichi tells her as he pulls his hand away from his face. “Harukawa was sort of like Amami, she briefly woke up for a couple of seconds before falling back asleep right away.”

“I fell out of my pod,” Himiko admits. “But luckily Kiibo caught me.”

Kiibo rolls his eyes heavily. “You’re lucky I knew you were about to wake up. At least Saihara was smart enough to wait for me to help him.”

Shuichi bashfully looks away. “I was actually too disorientated to do much.”

“So does that mean Amami is going to wake up soon?” Kaede asks hopefully. “Because...I’d really like to talk to him as soon as I can.”

I need to thank him for staying with me right until the very end. I should also apologise too. He must’ve been so scared. He probably thought I died right next to him.

Shuichi’s face goes carefully blank before he clears his throat and says, “that’s right, he should wake up soon. In the meantime...ah, would you like a drink, perhaps? You should be okay if you just have a cup of water...”

“A couple of sips of water should be fine,” Kiibo agrees. “However, if you’re hungry then unfortunately you’ll have to wait for just a little while. It’s been quite a while since you’ve used your actual body so-”

“My actual body?” Kaede raises an eyebrow. For what feels like the umpteenth time now, she looks down at her hands. Then something else catches her attention. She’s not in her typical uniform. She’s not wearing her pink vest or her purple skirt. Instead, she’s wearing a white dressing gown that reaches her knees.

Her arms and legs are exposed, which she finds uncomfortable since she's used to wearing long sleeves and socks. Kaede wraps herself in her blanket just a little tighter.

"Yes, your actual body," Kiibo repeats. "The body you used inside of the game wasn't your actual body but instead just an asset made for the simulation. You were designed to look extremely similar to how you currently look right now but for privacy reasons, some things about you were changed. Like your hair and eye colour, for example."

"What...colour are my eyes?" Kaede asks as she delicately runs her fingers along the skin just under her eyes. "They...they should be purple."

"Akamatsu, your eyes are actually blue," Kiibo responds. "A very dark blue-"

"What about my hair?!" She knows freaking out about what colour her hair and eyes are is probably very low on the list of things she should be worrying about right now but there's something startling about finding out that you don't look the way you should. She *knew* her hair looked odd earlier!

Himiko hesitates before trotting off and returning with a small mirror. She passes it to Kaede with a hesitant smile, which barely lasts a couple of seconds before Himiko goes back to grimacing. Kaede lifts the mirror up and sucks in a sharp breath when she sees her face.

She wouldn't say she looks abnormally different. Her facial features are pretty much the same. Her eyes are a very deep blue, which surprises her. She was expecting to look directly into violet eyes. She slowly moves her gaze to her hair and she abruptly bites the inside of her mouth. Her hair is blond but it also looks a little damaged. Her roots are a dark brown, an indication that her hair has very much been dyed at some point.

...I don't know why but I feel like I'm seconds away from bursting into tears. It's not that I don't like how I look. It's more so...I feel like I'm looking at a complete stranger and it really, really scares me.

She doesn't realise that the mirror has been taken from her hands until she spots that Shuichi is holding it. He's kneeling next to her with a sympathetic look on his face. Up close, Kaede can see how his eyes are a soft green. She thought they were supposed to be gold.

"Maybe we should've waited a bit before giving you a mirror," Shuichi murmurs absentmindedly.

"Nyeh, I didn't...I didn't mean to upset you, Akamatsu," Himiko says, sounding rather upset with herself.

"I'm...I'm not upset," Kaede desperately insists despite being obviously shaken. She goes back to furiously wiping her eyes, which are once again damp with tears. "I'm just-"

"Really overwhelmed?" Shuichi offers. Kaede nods and he smiles softly. "I think that's exactly how each one of us felt when we first woke up too."

"If it helps, I don't think you look too different," Himiko tells her. She starts to play with her own brown hair. "If you sort out your roots then you'll look almost the same as you did in the game." She pauses. "If that's what you want."

"I..." Kaede chews on her lip nervously. "I don't really know what I want."

"Of course you don't," Shuichi responds with a grim smile. "You've only just woken up." He turns to Himiko. "Yumeno, we should probably give her some space."

Kaede opens her mouth to argue that she doesn't want space, that she actually really appreciates the company. However, she takes one look at Himiko's nervous expression and the complicated look in Shuichi's eyes and realises that perhaps she's not the only person who needs some time to think.

"Akamatsu, is it okay if I help you move somewhere a little more comfortable?" Kiibo asks. He gestures towards a couple of chairs and blankets on the floor, which are on the opposite side of the room near some bookcases. "Your legs will start to cramp up if you stay kneeling for too long."

Kaede blinks at the rather strange set up. "Um..."

Is there not a bed for me to rest on? It almost looks like everyone has been...sleeping on either the chairs or floor.

Himiko suddenly looks incredibly uncomfortable. "It's not as bad as it looks."

"But..." Kaede struggles to find the right words. "Why have you all been...camping out on the floor? Surely there must be somewhere more comfortable for us all to stay, right?"

Shuichi lifts his hand up towards his head, as if to reach for something. When he realises that he has nothing to grab, a faint flush crawls across his cheeks and he snaps his head to the side, refusing to look Kaede in the eye. "Akamatsu, um, I'm afraid that's the most we can offer you for now. The blankets and chairs, I mean. Oh, um, there's also some pillows too--"

Kaede frowns. "Saihara, what's going on?"

She doesn't want to sound ungrateful but there's something extremely off about the whole situation she's in right now. She looks at the designated resting area warily before turning to look at Shuichi, who is still refusing to look at her properly.

"...we can't leave this room," Shuichi tells her quietly. He fumbles with his sleeves and Kaede finally notices that he's wearing one of those horrible black and white hoodies. "I mean, um, there are two other rooms we can go into but...this office in particular? We can't leave it."

—

It turns out the other two rooms Shuichi mentioned are a bathroom and a room full of monitors. The main room, the room full of pods, is the biggest. The walls are white where the pods are and the flooring is made up of something hard and also white. However, the other side of the room where the chairs and blankets and pillows are has a deep grey carpet and creamy coloured wallpaper. There are a couple of desks and chairs with wheels and bookcases too. There's also a couple of windows but they've all been concealed by curtains, which occasionally flutter when the wind catches them.

Kaede ends up stubbornly denying the chairs and blankets and instead asks if Kiibo can help her get to the bathroom. He doesn't seem too flustered by her request but does point out he can't exactly go inside with her.

"It's fine," she had told him. "I don't think I'll need your help anyway."

"I'll, um, be outside if you end up needing someone to lean on," Himiko had reassured her anxiously, hands twisted together by her chest.

The bathroom is incredibly small and cramped. To her surprise, there's a two-in-one bath and shower inside and a cabinet containing some towels and spare clothes. Huh. Why would there be a

bath in an office? It's almost as if it's been put there on the presumption that someone might need to wash themselves.

Kaede realises that she has countless questions bouncing around inside of her head. She staggers over to the bath before sitting down on the side of it heavily, using the railing on the opposite side of the wall to steady herself. She doesn't want to fall and end up asking someone for help because one, that would be embarrassing. Two, something about the entire situation she's in just doesn't sit right with her.

Shuichi said they can't leave the office but is that actually right? Does he mean that they've been trapped in here by someone? Is the exit locked? Is Monokuma and Tsumugi behind this?

...is Shuichi actively keeping everyone in the office on purpose?

No, that can't be right. I can't think of any reason why he would do that. I'm just...super confused. All that I know is that we're in an office and that there's three rooms. I've only seen two of the rooms and Maki is currently in the third one with all of the monitors. However, when I asked to see it, Shuichi said that Maki needed some space and we should probably leave her alone. I just wonder what's on all those monitors.

Maybe Kiibo knows what's going on. If he was around when Shuichi, Maki and Himiko had woken up then that must mean he is the most informed person here. It just doesn't make any sense how he's here. He was in the simulation. Kaede had spent time with him. He died. Yet...

Kiibo's also the only person who looks exactly the same as he did inside of the simulation. There has to be a reason for that. Is it because he's a robot and we're all human? But that doesn't explain why my hair and eyes look different. Kiibo said they were changed for privacy reasons but...argh, nothing is making any sense!

It frustrates her that her mind is wandering into dead end after dead end. She tightens her grip on the bathroom railing and squeezes her eyes shut, swallowing down a wave of nausea that hits her out of nowhere. She thinks if she tries to stand right now then she'll end up falling.

It's a comfort knowing that she's not entirely alone. When Rantaro wakes up, she thinks that she'll stay with him for the time being. It's not that she distrusts everyone here...well, maybe that's sort of a lie. She's not entirely sure if she trusts Maki all that much due to her blunt attitude and Shuichi also has a frustrating tendency to refuse to look her in the eye. Himiko seems nice enough but she also looks like she's constantly on the verge of tears. Kiibo is...complicated. He seems to know who Kaede is but that's what worries her. She doesn't know how much this particular Kiibo knows.

Everyone seems vaguely familiar, especially Shuichi for some reason. Even though he has a habit of hiding his face, Kaede can't help but feel this strange feeling of fondness every time she looks at him.

Perhaps the two of us were friends once upon a time. He did seem...genuinely upset when he realised I was crying earlier. It's annoying that I can't remember him.

After waiting a couple of minutes to let the nausea pass, Kaede ends up wobbling over to the sink. She grips the side of the ceramic sink tightly and sighs as her legs go back to trembling. Ugh, she wishes that they would work normally already! She doesn't have time for this!

She's about to splash water on her face when she abruptly stops. Her eyes nervously flicker towards the mirror that's in front of the sink. She's mildly relieved when she only sees herself in

the reflection but that doesn't stop her from keeping an eye on the wall behind her in the glass. She knows it's stupid but she's almost expecting the wall to swing open and for...

Damn it, Kaede. Pull yourself together! You're not in the simulation anymore. Besides, with how thin the walls are, it would be impossible for there to be a secret doorway in here.

The tap squeaks as she turns it on and Kaede splashes cold water onto her face, shuddering when the cool droplets trickle back into the sink loudly. It feels refreshing.

She ends up raiding the cabinet and is pleased when she finds an unopened toothbrush and some toothpaste. To her surprise, she finds a lot of unopened supplies such as toothbrushes and toiletries.

Huh, I wonder what all of this is doing here? There's, like, loads of unused stuff lying around. Hmm, I do see a couple of used toothbrushes in the cup by the sink...ah, they must belong to Shuichi, Maki and Himiko since there's only three of them. I wonder how long they've been here for?

After she's done freshening up, Kaede reluctantly decides to look at herself once more. Properly. She pokes one of her cheeks experimentally with her finger, sucking in a breath when she actually feels her skin. Then, she leans forward and examines her hair, narrowing in on her roots. It seems she's a natural brunette. Her roots are very dark.

There's something unsettling about not being able to remember when she dyed her hair. Scratch that, there's something unsettling about not knowing how or when she ended up inside one of the pods in the other room. She feels her back tense and takes a deep breath through her nose. She wants to say that she feels safe now that she's out of the simulation but she feels like she's at the very top of an extremely tall roller coaster and she's seconds away from plummeting down.

Her stomach does flips as she stumbles towards the door. She wants answers and she wants them now. She doesn't think she'll last another second waiting in anticipation.

I hate being kept in the dark. I just want to know what's going on. I'm so sick of feeling afraid all of the time.

When she opens the door, Himiko is the first person to notice. The small girl's eyes go wide before she darts over, hesitantly hovering near Kaede as the pianist uses the wall as a crutch.

"I can help-"

"I'm fine," Kaede insists before stumbling over to a chair and collapsing into it. She lets out a sigh of relief and wipes her forehead, which has a fine layer of sweat building on it.

"Um..." Himiko chews her lip before thrusting out her arms towards Kaede. "I think I found some clothes that should fit you. They're too big for me and they're a little big for Harukawa so they shouldn't be too small for you."

Himiko turns her head as she starts to ramble. Just like Shuichi, she struggles to look her in the eye. However, Kaede senses that instead of hiding her face out of sheer nervousness like Shuichi, Himiko is keeping her head turned because she's shy. It makes Kaede feel guilty for snapping at her earlier.

Kaede takes the clothes with a half-hearted smile and places them on her lap. "Thank you."

Himiko blinks before smiling timidly. "Oh, um, you're welcome. I tried to find you something that wasn't black and white." Himiko purses her lips before glaring at the floor. "A lot of stuff we have

is black and white. It's annoying."

She's not really sure how to respond to that but it does make Kaede feel hopeful. Clearly Himiko doesn't like Monokuma if she has a problem with black and white colour schemes. If that's the case then she should be treating Himiko as a friend, not an enemy.

"Akamatsu!" Kaede turns her head and spots Kiibo leaving the small monitor room. Before the door closes, Kaede catches a glimpse of Maki sitting on a chair inside, one of her legs pulled to her chest. "I thought you were going to take a little longer."

"Yeah, well..." Kaede chews her lip as she spots Shuichi sitting by the large computer. He's looking down intensely at a monitor that's connected to it. It's the only monitor in the room. "I have a lot of questions and I know at least one of you in this room has the answers I'm looking for."

Himiko instantly goes back to looking nervous. She looks at Kiibo helplessly.

Kiibo doesn't even look phased. "You're right. One of us probably do have the answers you're looking for but-"

"No buts!" Kaede huffs impatiently. "I'm serious, I really don't care if you think I'm too weak to handle the truth about," she gestures around the room with both of her hands, "all of this!"

"We don't think you're weak!" Himiko argues.

"It would simply be more convenient if we tell both you and Amami at the same time," Kiibo tells her. He looks over to the pod Rantaro is in and pauses. "Oh, well would you look at that. I think he's waking up."

Shuichi seemingly snaps out of whatever trance he was in whilst looking down at the monitor and turns his attention towards Rantaro's pod curiously. His shoulders look incredibly tense.

Kaede feels something hopeful flutter in her chest as both Kiibo and Himiko dash over to the pod. Kiibo's right. She can't exactly see Rantaro due to the angling of the pod but she does see a hand reach out of it once again. She swallows as she hears light murmuring. Rantaro's voice is thick with fatigue.

"matsu?"

Her name is the first thing he says.

It makes her eyes sting with tears for some reason and before she can stop herself, Kaede hauls herself out of her chair, ignoring Himiko's suggestion of sitting back down. She stumbles over to the pods, yelping as she suddenly trips over her own feet. She braces herself, ready to crash onto the floor when she's suddenly caught.

"Ah, please be careful!" Shuichi looks concerned as he helps Kaede back to her feet, both of his hands on her shoulders. "Akamatsu, you really should be resting-"

Kaede can't help but ignore Shuichi's advice as she finally spots Rantaro. He's still laid back in the pod, which is probably for the best. His eyes are wide and frantic, as if searching for something extremely important. When they finally land on Kaede, it's like a switch is flipped. Rantaro instantly relaxes and a lump grows in her throat.

He recognises me even though I look different...

Rantaro doesn't look too different to Kaede's surprise. His eyes are the exact same shade of green as they were in the simulation and like Kaede's hair, it's also bleached, although his is a very faded lime green. The only reason why she knows his hair is dyed is because of the slight hint of black in his roots.

He looks at her wordlessly from inside the pod, blinking slowly. His mouth twitches occasionally, as if he has something he wants to say but can't find the right words.

Rantaro doesn't seem to realise he's in a really strange room. He seems more focussed on staring at Kaede as if she was a ghost. Then Kaede realises that he probably thinks she *is* one.

He held me whilst I was dying. He thought I was going to die.

Shuichi quickly catches on that she wants to get closer so he helps her stagger towards Rantaro's pod silently. Rantaro's eyes flicker towards Shuichi and a slight frown grows on his face. The frown deepens when he spots Kiibo. However, when Kaede finally reaches the side of his pod, Rantaro turns his attention back to her pretty much instantaneously.

Up close, Kaede realises that Rantaro has a light dusting of freckles covering his cheeks and nose.

"H-Hi!" Kaede awkwardly squeaks when she realises that she's staring. She places one of her hands on the pod for stability and Shuichi takes that as a hint to let her go.

Rantaro continues to stare before reaching out a hand slowly. Kaede watches it quietly as it reaches out further and further, chewing the inside of her mouth apprehensively. The lump in her throat gets harder to ignore when he ends up putting a hand on her cheek and keeps it there. Rantaro's eyes go wide for a split second when he makes contact. It's almost as if he's surprised that he's able to touch her.

"You're alive," he mumbles, his voice sounding suspiciously choked up. He tilts his head up so that they're looking eye to eye. Kaede quickly realises that she's not the only one who is about to burst into tears.

"I'm alive," Kaede echoes. The lump in her throat becomes too much to ignore. She ends up crying.

—

They both end up sitting on a pile of blankets. Himiko sits near them, her knees pulled up to her chest. Shuichi once again goes back to sitting by the computer whilst Kiibo situates himself in front of the small group gathered on the blankets.

A couple of hours have passed since Rantaro woke up. Like Kaede, he freshened himself up and was also shocked when he caught his reflection in the mirror.

"I could've sworn my hair was darker," Rantaro had murmured when he and Kaede had lowered themselves onto the blankets.

Kaede had simply smiled tightly at him before gesturing to her own roots.

"So," Kaede says as she gets comfortable. She looks at Kiibo sternly, as if daring him to make an excuse to continue prolonging the inevitable. "I have a lot of questions and you have a lot of answers."

"Indeed," Kiibo responds. He spares a glance at Shuichi, who doesn't notice. The detective is once

again transfixed by the computer, chewing on the skin around his thumb as he stares down at the monitor in front of him. “So-”

“How are you here?” Rantaro blurts out before smiling bashfully. “Ah, whoops. Sorry, I didn’t mean to sound so accusing. I just thought...”

“That I shouldn’t be here? That is a fair presumption,” Kiibo tells him. He pauses, as if deep in thought. “I think in order to answer your question, I should explain something else first. However...” Kiibo’s expression turns grim. “The truth is, there really is no easy way to say this. I will try my best to not overwhelm the two of you but-”

“Kiibo, we both just want the truth,” Kaede interjects. “If you’re about to sugar coat everything just because you think that neither of us can handle what you’re about to say then don’t. *Please*, I just want to know what’s going on.”

Himiko fidgets with a loose thread on one of the blankets. “Kiibo is right, Akamatsu. The truth about...all of this really isn’t easy to hear. When I first heard the truth I...” There’s a distant look in her eyes. “I’m just glad I wasn’t on my own.”

“It’s that bad, huh?” Rantaro goes to play with a ring on his finger before realising that he isn’t wearing any jewellery. He grimaces before sighing softly. “Either way, it’s only fair if we’re all on the same page.”

“Very well then,” Kiibo says. “Please allow me a moment to figure out how to start this explanation.” His eyes glaze over momentarily and for a moment, Kaede thinks Kiibo has turned himself off. A couple of seconds later, his eyes go back to normal and Kiibo looks like he has fully prepared himself. “Alright. I’m ready. Are the two of you ready?”

“Of course I am,” Kaede mumbles a little too impatiently.

Kiibo doesn’t seem to mind her short temper. “The killing games that happen in the simulation have a proper name, which is Danganronpa. You’re both aware of the rules, yes? Roughly sixteen students are gathered and are forced to kill each other until there’s only two people left. Monokuma is in charge of making this happen, although the truth is Monokuma is merely a mascot for the killing games-”

“That’s because Shirogane is the one who is in charge, right?” Kaede intervenes. She feels her temper flare at even just the thought of the blue haired girl.

“Shirogane...was Monokuma’s partner during this game, yes,” Kiibo says.

“During *this* game?” Rantaro mumbles. He rubs his chin.

“The truth is, this isn’t the first killing game to happen,” Kiibo reveals and holds up a hand when Kaede opens her mouth. “And no, I’m not referring to the glitch that is causing the simulation to loop either.”

“Huh?” Kaede blinks. She notices Himiko tense up tightly next to her, her eyes trained on the floor.

“The killing game you were in, Danganronpa V3: Killing Harmony, was the fifty-third killing game hosted by Team Danganronpa,” Kiibo says.

Kaede feels her stomach drop. “Fifty...”

“*Fifty-third?*” Rantaro repeats incredulously. He spares a look at the computer and then at the

Pods. "Are you saying that this isn't the first time that there's been a killing game?"

"That is correct." Kiibo somehow manages to look sympathetic as he closes his eyes, steeling himself. When he opens them back up, he looks determined. "Danganronpa is a game show that is enjoyed world wide. Due to its unrivalled popularity, there's always high demand for a new season to be released yearly."

She feels a hand slip into her own and squeeze tightly. When she checks, Kaede realises that the hand belongs to Rantaro. He's staring at Kiibo in disbelief. "Excuse me?"

"It's true," Himiko says feebly. "There's an entire audience who loves Danganronpa. I've seen the audience with my own eyes. I've even...heard what they've had to say about all of us."

"So...we've all been participating in some...sick *game show*?" Kaede asks. She shakes her head softly. "That...*can't* be right. No way. If people knew we had been trapped in a simulation and were being forced to kill each other then--"

"They'd sit back and watch because they'd find that entertaining," Kiibo finishes for her.

Kaede can't stop the sudden spark of anger that causes her to glare fiercely at the robot. "You're *wrong*."

"I'm not," Kiibo firmly responds. "Akamatsu, I am not trying to offend you but you know absolutely nothing about the real world. All of your memories, everything you think you know are a part of the Danganronpa world."

"Everything I *think* I know?!" Kaede turns to Rantaro, who stares back at her helplessly. "Are you hearing this?"

"Of course I am but--"

"I refuse to believe that was I was forced into some simulation and made to play a stupid killing game for...for *entertainment*," Kaede spits furiously. She notices Himiko flinch almost violently next to her. "This all has to be some sort of misunderstanding--"

"Akamatsu, you weren't forced into the simulation," Kiibo says. Kaede freezes and gapes at him, unconvinced by his claim. "No one here was."

"...you're lying," Kaede hisses, jabbing a finger at him. She turns to Rantaro and Himiko for support. "Hey, you both think he's lying too, right?"

Himiko pales and her voice catches in her throat as she says, "he's telling the truth."

Kaede stills before shaking her head once more. "But I don't even remember entering the simulation. I...I only remember waking up inside of some random school and...before that I..."

"We were all ushered into some van by these random people," Rantaro says.

Kaede nods furiously, quickly latching onto his words. "That's right! *That's* what happened--"

"That's what you were made to think," Himiko says quietly and the fleeting feeling of hope Kaede had felt dissipates rapidly. "Because our memories..."

A cold, icy feeling washes over Kaede as she looks at the defeated expression on Himiko's face. It almost looks like she's in pain as she curls her knees to her chest a little more firmly. There are

unshed tears gathered in her eyes.

“Hey...” Rantaro hesitates before gently putting a hand on Himiko’s shoulder. “There’s no need to look so upset...”

“That’s right!” Kaede clasps her hands together tightly. “I’m sure all of this is just one big misunderstanding-”

“You keep saying that but you’re *wrong!*” Himiko yells before pressing her face into her knees. She lets out a muffled sob. “You weren’t there when Shirogane and Monokuma told us the truth! You weren’t there so you don’t understand! It’s *impossible* for all of this to be a misunderstanding!”

“Y-Yumeno...” Kaede winces as the smaller girl chokes out another sob. From the corner of her eye, she spots Shuichi grimace and look away, almost as if he’s also trying to hide tears of his own.

“The reason you don’t remember entering the simulation is because everyone was given new memories,” Kiibo explains. Kaede falters as the robot sighs heavily. “You see, the truth is...”

Kiibo reaches behind him and pulls out a couple of files he had grabbed earlier. Straight away Kaede notices a strange logo on the front of them all. What stands out to her is that the design contains Monokuma’s red eye. There’s also a large ‘*DR*’ in the middle, which Kaede guesses stands for Danganronpa. The robot hesitates before slowly flipping open a file. He reads through it calmly before passing it over to Kaede.

The pianist takes a deep breath before turning the file around so she can read it properly, allowing Rantaro to get a better look when he looks at it from over her shoulder. Straight away she notices a picture of herself clipped to the top of the file. She looks exactly how she looks now in the picture. Dyed blond hair with dark roots. Blue eyes. Then, she notices the black and white hoodie she’s wearing in the photograph and bristles.

She has a messenger bag slung over her shoulder and she notices colourful keychains dangling from the zip. One seems to be of a girl with blue hair and blue eyes. She’s wearing a school uniform. There’s a microphone in her hand. Accompanying that keychain is another girl with crazy hair colours and pink eyes. Her own uniform is torn.

Kaede looks at herself and feels her breath catch in her throat. Her eyes look so...dead. The smile on her face is painfully fake.

There’s no doubt about it. The girl in the photograph is me.

She lifts the photograph up so she can hesitantly read the paperwork under it. The name on the file...isn’t Kaede Akamatsu. It’s a completely different name that Kaede doesn’t recognise. She continues to read through the information. According to the paperwork, she’s twenty one years old, she’s female, she doesn’t have a job and has...

...been a fan of Danganronpa for as long as she can remember.

Something catches her attention a little further down and she reads a couple of lines that have been highlighted.

“I guess my favourite characters are the more musical ones? I’m a huge fan of Sayaka Maizono and Ibuki Mioda. I suppose you could say my favourite seasons are the earlier ones. As much as I love Danganronpa, it’s been a while since you’ve included an Ultimate whose talent relates to music. That’s why I’ve decided to audition as the Ultimate Pianist. I mean, I’ve never played a

piano before in my entire life but that's not a worry, right?"

She sucks in a sharp breath as she continues to read.

"I don't really care what role you give me if I'm being completely honest. Being the antagonist would be cool I guess but as long as I get to join the Danganronpa world then I'm fine with anything. I truly don't care either way. Use me as you see fit."

She realises she's reading a transcript from an interview. An interview she did, apparently.

Kaede almost lets the file drop from her hands but catches it at the last second. There's a piece of paper at the very back of the file that she hasn't skimmed through yet and she pulls it out. All of the colour drains from her face instantaneously.

It's some sort of character reference sheet and she finds the information on it scarily familiar.

Name: Kaede Akamatsu

Ultimate Talent: Ultimate Pianist

Age: ??

Height: 5'8"

Weight: 53kg

Birthday: March 26th

Family: Two parents and a twin sister

Role: False Protagonist

About: Kaede is a very friendly girl who adores playing the piano. Her backstory includes Kaede playing the piano so much that she forgets to sleep because of it. This earned her the nickname 'Piano Freak'. Due to spending most of her life playing the piano, Kaede never had many friends growing up. Despite this, Kaede is extremely optimistic and surprisingly selfless. She is the type of character who puts others before herself. However, despite being such a positive person, Kaede is also very stubborn, which can cause problems for herself and others in the long run.

Kaede's Fate: Kaede ends up becoming the first official blackened and is punished for the death of her classmate, Rantaro Amami. Her punishment includes Monokuma forcing her to play the Flea Waltz with her entire body whilst a noose is tied around her neck. She ends up being hung for her crime.

She can't read anymore. She *can't*. Kaede swallows heavily and abruptly snaps the file shut and allows it to fall to the floor.

...I'd be naïve if I tried to convince myself that all of this is just one elaborate prank. Kiibo isn't cruel enough to show me this for no reason, right? But even so...

Even as several hands gently squeeze her arm and shoulders, Kaede fails to suppress a watery sob.

I didn't expect this. It turns out that I'm...that Kaede Akamatsu is simply just a character.

The air is forced from her lungs as a small weight slams into her chest. Kaede continues to fight back tears as Himiko hugs her tightly, burying her face into her neck. She feels another weight from behind and Kaede is vaguely aware that Rantaro is also holding her.

“...my apologies but there really wasn’t any other way to show you the truth,” Kiibo admits. “If I had told you that everyone here are fictional characters then I doubt you would’ve believed me.”

Kaede tries to nod but struggles, especially since she’s currently being held by two people. “S-So Shirogane was right when she said...that her killing game was scripted.”

“That’s right,” Kiibo says. “The killing game that Saihara, Harukawa and Yumeno survived was scripted.”

“I thought there could only be two survivors?” Rantaro points out quietly.

“Well...” Kiibo looks down at the floor wordlessly. “It turns out that if you break the glass wall down then you can leave by stepping into the white light past it.”

“White light...” Rantaro’s eyes go wide. “You mean the white light that appeared when only Akamatsu and I were left alive?”

“Yes,” Kiibo says. “It automatically appears when there’s only two survivors left. However, it’s also surrounding the school too. It’s just that it’s invisible behind the wall. Do you remember how there was supposedly a sky outside of the glass?”

Kaede nods. “Y-Yeah?”

“It’s nothing more than a projection,” Kiibo reveals. “If the projection was to be turned off then all everyone would see is white light.”

“Right...” Kaede murmurs. Truth be told, how the white light works isn’t high on her list of concerns right now. The revelation that she’s actually just a fictional character that’s a part of a fictional story is too overwhelming to just brush to the side.

I’m...not real. Kaede Akamatsu isn’t real yet...she’s who I am. She’s who I think I am. I’m still Kaede Akamatsu. I’m just in the wrong body. However, Kaede Akamatsu doesn’t even have a body. She only exists inside of a simulation.

“How come I’m still Kaede Akamatsu?” Kaede suddenly asks. “I...I shouldn’t technically exist outside of the simulation, right? So how come...”

“Altering memories is a...tricky process,” Kiibo says. “When everyone entered the simulation for the first time, you all weren’t characters yet...” Kiibo awkwardly averts his gaze when everyone in the room flinches. “You were the people who auditioned to be in Danganronpa. A lot of your memories were altered whilst inside of the simulation. However, despite multiple attempts, no one on Team Danganronpa has figured out how to revert everyone’s memories back to their original state once they wake up from the game automatically.”

“So let me get this straight. We enter the simulation as our original selves and then we’re given brand new memories?” Rantaro says. When Kiibo nods, he continues. “Our original memories are erased, or simply just made so that they can’t be remembered. However, once we leave the simulation, we still think we’re the characters we were turned into?”

Kiibo nods sagely. “It’s like I said, altering memories is an extremely difficult process. As much as Team Danganronpa have tried, they still haven’t found a way to make it so you all wake up in your

original states.”

“What’s so important about that anyway?” Kaede asks. She looks around the room and frowns. “And who is this Team Danganronpa you’re on about? You’re on about actual people, right?”

“Ah...” Kiibo’s eyes flicker over to Shuichi, who abruptly looks away when he realises Kiibo is staring at him. Huh? What’s going on?

“Team Danganronpa should have some sort of responsibility to make sure we’re looked after once we wake up, right?” Kaede presses. “Yet no one has entered this room once.” No one has left it either, she realises.

For them to put us through hell and then not even make sure we’re okay when we wake up...that’s so messed up. What if I had needed some sort of medical assistance when I woke up? I don’t think anyone here knows much more than the basic first aid.

She feels lightheaded and if it wasn’t for Himiko and Rantaro holding her up, she thinks she might be flat out on the floor by now.

Wait a second. What was it Shuichi had said earlier? That we’re not allowed to leave this office? He never explained what he meant by that.

“The thing is...” Kiibo pauses. “It’s not exactly a case of them not checking up on everyone on purpose. It’s more so...”

“Would you want people who run a game like Danganronpa looking after you?” Shuichi suddenly asks from the computer, causing Kaede to startle. He looks surprisingly determined, his head held high.

Kaede quickly catches onto the implication behind Shuichi’s words. “Then are you saying...”

“*You’re* the one keeping us in this office?” Rantaro asks.

Kaede’s mouth suddenly feels dry. She looks down at Himiko, who is still absentmindedly rubbing her back soothingly.

...don’t tell me Shuichi has been forcing everyone to stay here.

“It’s not safe to leave,” Shuichi explains gently. He looks over at the exit wistfully. “Team Danganronpa...they’re not nice people.”

“Have you met them?” Kaede asks.

Shuichi nods. “Only once.”

“The team had access to this office throughout the original fifty-third killing game,” Kiibo says. “There were always a couple of people in here at all times to make sure everything was running smoothly. They were around when Saihara, Harukawa and Yumeno woke up from their game. It was known at that point that there was a potential glitch but after looking at the programming, it was hoped that there wasn’t a glitch, per se, but instead a line of coding that was misunderstood.”

“When someone dies inside of the simulation, it’s expected that they wake up from it right away,” Shuichi explains. “But no one did.”

“So the team hoped that everyone would wake up once the game had officially ended,” Kiibo

continues. “As that would be the most logical thing to happen. It was hoped that someone made a mistake with the coding and made it so instead of waking up when you die, you wake up when the game ends. A misunderstanding like that is rather innocent. However...”

“They didn’t realise that the simulation had an actual glitch,” Rantaro finishes, rubbing his forehead. “Ah...”

“The ending of our game was...rather intense,” Shuichi admits. He chews his lip. “And...”

“None of us trust Team Danganronpa at all,” Himiko mumbles, gesturing towards Shuichi and the room Maki is in.

“There was a moment when all of the staff left the office to try and figure something out,” Shuichi says. “And they, um, left the keys to the office behind under the presumption that nothing would happen to them.”

“...so you took them and locked yourselves inside?” Kaede asks as all the pieces of the puzzle slowly come together.

“We all thought we were going to die at the end of our game,” Shuichi reveals quietly. He reaches for his head before abruptly stopping when he’s met with nothing but air. He instead lowers his head. “We were all prepared to die.”

“...what?” Kaede’s eyes go impossibly wide.

“We all thought that we could use our lives to end Danganronpa,” Shuichi continues, licking his lips. “We were under the presumption that the audience no longer wanted Danganronpa to exist. Even Shirogane thought that was the case too so she had Kiibo destroy the school.”

“Did you argue with the audience during the sixth trial?” Rantaro suddenly asks.

Shuichi nods. “Yeah, that’s right.”

“Shirogane said the sixth trial was the only trial that wasn’t scripted,” Rantaro murmurs. “I wonder if she knew that the audience was going to turn on her and Danganronpa in the end.”

“That...doesn’t really matter,” Shuichi says. “What matters is that Harukawa, Yumeno and I survived. Kiibo had broken down the wall so the white light was easy to access. I guess we all ended up stepping into it and...we all woke up in here.”

Yeah, that lines up with what they told me earlier. When Maki woke up, she had fallen asleep right away. Himiko had fallen into Kiibo’s arms and Shuichi was the only one who stayed still.

“Hold on a second. Didn’t someone say Kiibo was already in here when you had all woken up?” Kaede points out.

“Correct,” Kiibo says. “I’ve been in this office from the very start. The truth is I am property of Team Danganronpa. I was built outside of the simulation so the team could figure out what I would look like inside of the game. I guess you could say that...” Kiibo withers. “I’m basically a prototype. Or, to put it simply, a reference for the design crew so they knew what to make my character model look like inside of the simulation.”

Kaede blinks and looks over at the pods. Huh, now that she thinks about it, whilst there are sixteen pods, there are six that are currently not being used. If Kiibo never needed to go in one in the first place then one of the pods must not actually be functional at the moment.

“I admittedly just did as I was told when helping out in the office,” Kiibo says. “Since Team Danganronpa never gave me any memories personally, I just blindly followed orders. I...only got my memories right at the end when Team Danganronpa erased the memories of Kiibo inside of the simulation. I’m fairly sure they gave me his memories so I could preserve them on the off chance they needed them again.” He wrings his hands by his chest. “Whilst I can’t experience emotions, when simulation Kiibo gave me his memories I...was filled with the desire to protect you all.”

“...hey, is there a way to watch the killing game from this office?” Rantaro asks.

Kiibo gestures towards the other room. “Yes, the room full of monitors shows what is happening inside of the simulation at all times. Because of that, I was able to watch what happened to me, well, simulation Kiibo after his memories were deleted. That’s how I knew he took down the wall.”

“If Team Danganronpa are capable of creating their own characters and putting them into simulations then...” Kaede chews her lip, her brows furrowed. “Then why do they get *actual* people to play Danganronpa?” Her previous feeling of gloom slowly turns into anger. “Why are real people suffering when-”

“Akamatsu, I’m afraid you don’t understand just how popular Danganronpa is,” Kiibo tells her. “I was made in the middle of the auditioning process and I’ve witnessed first hand how many people turned up to try and become a part of the Danganronpa world. There were thousands, if not *millions* of people auditioning for a role this season. No one...no one cares that their memories are altered and that they have to become a different person. As long as they get to be a part of their beloved Danganronpa then...”

“The world loves Danganronpa,” Shuichi says softly. “And despite everything...”

Kaede raises an eyebrow. “What?”

“...never mind,” Shuichi quickly says, shaking his head. “All we can do right now is wait for everyone to wake up. Since it’s most likely that people will wake up in pairs, it might take a while for everyone to-”

“Well you just said it yourself that another way to leave the game is to break down the wall and step into the light!” Kaede intervenes. “So-”

“Absolutely *no one* is allowed to re-enter the game!” Shuichi yells sternly, causing his chair to fall over as he stands up abruptly. His cheeks flush darkly as everyone stares at him in surprise. “W-What I mean is we’re not entirely sure if the wall breaking was just a one off. Since the simulation has a glitch, we, ah, really don’t know if it’s safe to re-enter.”

“But Kiibo made it sound like breaking down the wall was a definite way to end the game without any murders,” Rantaro points out. “Even if just one of us goes back in and tries to-”

“*No.*” Shuichi almost looks like an entirely different person as he positions himself in front of the pods defensively, almost as if he’s going to single-handedly stop everyone from going near them. “I...cannot let any of us risk our safety by re-entering the simulation.”

“So you’re expecting us to...wait here whilst everyone goes through killing game after killing game until everyone is out?” Kaede asks weakly. That really doesn’t sit right with her and she can tell Rantaro feels the same.

“That’s not fair,” Rantaro says, his voice low. “Saihara, you’ve been through a killing game

yourself. You know how horrible it is to watch your friends die one after another-”

“Is there not a way to wake everyone up ourselves?” Kaede presses. She points to the computer Shuichi is next to. “There must be some sort of fail-safe that-”

“There’s not. I’ve checked,” Shuichi quickly answers. He grimaces. “I...hate this as much as everyone else does but...” Shuichi looks at Kaede with misty eyes. “I don’t think I can watch if you re-enter the simulation and end up dying again. If I have to watch you die again then...”

His lip trembles and Kaede straight away realises that there’s no way Shuichi is keeping everyone in the office out of malice. He’s just trying to keep everyone safe despite having all the odds stacked against him.

The lump in her throat returns and Kaede nibbles on a dry patch of skin on her bottom lip. Even though she is nowhere near the pods, she realises that her entire body is trembling at just the thought of jumping headfirst back into a killing game. She wants to save everyone, of course she does. However, the need to fight that had previously ignited her bones slowly starts to trickle away.

...the more she thinks about even *thinking* about re-entering the simulation, the more terrified she feels. Her stomach twists into knots. Oh. She realises that it’s oh so easy to talk about rescuing everyone, to talk about storming into the game and saving everyone. However, now that she’s toying with the idea of re-joining the simulation...

Himiko pulls her face away from her neck, a conflicted look on her face as she says, “you’ve just gotten out, Akamatsu. At least...let yourself have some time before you even think about going back in.”

“No one is going back in,” Shuichi responds, although there’s no actual threat hidden in his voice. If anything, he sounds tired.

Rantaro suddenly frowns. “Hey, how long does it actually take for a new game to start?”

“Ah...” Shuichi winces and quickly looks away. “The thing is...”

“Another game started the moment the two of you woke up,” Kiibo says. “Harukawa has been keeping an eye on things from inside the monitor room.”

“What?!” If her legs didn’t feel like jelly then Kaede would’ve jumped up from the floor to check the monitors herself. “Why didn’t you say so earlier?!”

“Because you had quite literally just woken up,” Kiibo answers. “And I knew I’d have to tell you about Danganronpa. Besides, there’s unfortunately not a lot you can do about it at this point.”

“Of course there is,” Rantaro says. “We can put a stop to all of this right now if one of us simply re-joins the simulation and-”

“I’ve already said no!” Shuichi argues, his voice loud and firm. His eyes flicker from the pods and the group of people by the blankets. One of his fists starts to tremble. “No one is allowed to re-enter the simulation under *any* circumstances. Do I make myself clear?”

“...no, you don’t,” Rantaro responds. He raises an eyebrow. “Saihara, I’m really struggling to understand what your thought process for all of this is. Sure, it might be risky to re-join the game, especially if it turns out leaving through the wall was just a one off but imagine the payoff if it turns out that exit *is* still available. Everyone will be able to leave and-”

“It’s...” Shuichi hesitates. His entire body starts to tremble along with his fist. “It’s just...too much of a risk and...” He lets out a shaky breath, his eyes locked onto the floor. “You do realise that if you re-join and end up dying, your memories will be reset?”

Ah, that’s right. Everyone’s memories are reset during the start of each new game. Kaede curls into herself ever so slightly. She’s been pushed far past feeling overwhelmed. It’s just blow after blow. She thinks if she was on her own then maybe things would be different right now. Maybe she’d be an uncontrollable mess on the floor.

Instead, she has Himiko softly holding her and Rantaro glued to her side. She has Kiibo carefully explaining the truth to her in a way that she’s grateful for.

“I think we should all take a moment to calm down,” Kiibo suggests.

“It’s not that none of us here haven’t re-entered the simulation because we don’t care,” Himiko practically whispers, turning her head to look up at Rantaro. “I’ve...really, really hated having to watch you all go through something so horrible for a second time. It’s just...” She sniffs and bites down hard on her lip when it starts to wobble. “I think all of us are...too terrified to even think about going back into the simulation.”

“Yumeno...” Rantaro suddenly looks incredibly guilty. “I wasn’t trying to...” He rubs the back of his head awkwardly. “Guilt you all into going back. I...” He smiles grimly. “I agree. Even just thinking about going back inside sounds daunting.”

“If we end up going back inside and get ourselves trapped, who knows what Team Danganronpa will do,” Shuichi says. “It doesn’t help that...” He looks away. “They’ve been broadcasting everything.”

“They...have?” Kaede asks weakly. “People are actually still watching us?”

“Just the people inside of the simulation,” Shuichi responds. He grits his teeth and chokes down a frustrated noise. “Despite everything, there are still people watching...”

“Even though we thought we had ended Danganronpa,” Himiko murmurs weakly. “I guess we were naïve to think we’d won so easily.”

An endless pit grows in Kaede’s stomach.

Well, she asked for the truth and she certainly got it.

—

She watches through half-lidded eyes as Rantaro reads through his own file a little while later. It’s dark out and the sky has been swallowed up by dark, grey clouds.

Kaede can tell that Rantaro is upset whilst reading his file, although she doesn’t stop him from going through it. If he wants to know a little more about who he was before entering the killing game then who is she to stop him? At least he’s handling reading the file a lot better than her. Apart from the occasional frown, Rantaro’s expression hasn’t changed much. He mostly just looks exhausted.

“Hey,” Rantaro murmurs as he lightly nudges Kaede’s shoulder. He gestures down at his file with his eyes. “Apparently the killing game we were in wasn’t my first killing game.”

“What?”

“Yeah...” Rantaro smiles ruefully. No wonder his file is a little thicker than hers. “According to this, I was a survivor of the previous killing game. I guess that explains where my talent originates from.”

That’s right, Rantaro is the Ultimate Survivor. “Oh...I suppose it does.”

“I just find it so strange that I can’t recall a single thing that happened,” Rantaro responds. He examines a piece of paper closely before sighing. “So supposedly, I survived the fifty-second killing game but sacrificed myself and ended up having to join the fifty-third game? Huh, I wonder if all the games are linked or something.”

Something bitter festers in Kaede’s mind. “That’s horrible...”

Rantaro shrugs helplessly. “I suppose I should be grateful that I don’t have to remember two killing games, huh?”

“You shouldn’t have to feel grateful in the first place,” Kaede grumbles. “It just shows that Team Danganronpa don’t see us as people. They really do just see us as nothing but characters.”

Rantaro goes quiet as he closes his file with a soft sigh. “It’s kind of weird finding out that, you know, we’re technically characters. I mean...” He stretches out his hands and wiggles his fingers. “Is that completely true? Here we are, outside of the simulation thinking we’re still who Danganronpa turned us into.”

“But didn’t Kiibo mention something about how no one has made it possible for the simulation to revert our memories back to normal when we wake up?” Kaede points out. “Kinda implies that we’re supposed to have our memories restored as soon as we wake up.”

It more so implies that they’re not welcome in the real world, that characters like Kaede Akamatsu need to be dealt with accordingly.

Rantaro hums. “Even if that is the case, it looks like we’re still Kaede Akamatsu and Rantaro Amami.” He bumps her shoulder with his own. “And to be honest, I’m glad that we’re still characters.” He holds his hands up to do air quotes as he says this. “At least this version of ourselves have the brains to hate Danganronpa.”

Kaede snorts half-heartedly. “It is kind of ironic that Team Danganronpa turned us into people that hate Danganronpa. It feels extremely counterproductive.”

“Anything for entertainment,” Rantaro sighs, his voice dripping with sarcasm. He leans in a little closer and lowers his voice. “Hey, do you think that’s why Saihara locked us all in this office? Maybe he figured out if he let any of the team in then they’d try to take our memories away.”

Kaede glances over at Shuichi. His eyes are glued onto the computer screen. She’s noticed that the detective only ever seems to be at ease when he’s near it. “You might be right.”

“I mean, I was surprised when I woke up and found out we’re trapped in a locked office but I suppose now that we both know a little more...” Rantaro looks up at the ceiling with a thoughtful look on his face. “I think I’m glad we’re trapped in here. For now, at least.”

“Huh?”

“As long as no one can reach us, our memories are safe, yeah?” Rantaro says. “And ironically enough, I actually quite like being Rantaro Amami, although I suppose that’s the same as me saying I like being myself.” He rubs his head with an awkward smile. “We’re in a really weird

situation, aren't we?"

Kaede nods sharply. "Yeah, you can say that again."

"We're in a really weird-" Rantaro holds his hands up in mock defeat as Kaede elbows him with a snort.

The moment she realises that she's smiling, a horrible feeling of guilt almost swallows her whole and she feels her smile melt away quickly. Here she is laughing and joking around when her friends are trapped in another killing game.

Rantaro's face crumples in concern. "Hey, what's wrong?"

"I just..." Kaede pulls a face. "It really doesn't sit right with me that our only option is to apparently wait for everyone to wake up in pairs from the simulation. Even though no one actually dies...they still have to go through the pain of dying. What everyone is going to go through is going to be real to them, even if it's just for a little while for some of them."

A small part of her wants to approach Shuichi and ask if he'll reconsider letting everyone re-join the simulation. Even if it's just her, shouldn't at least one person go in and give everyone a heads up? It leaves a dreadful taste in her mouth just even thinking about letting everyone go through hell after hell.

"It's...not nice to think about, is it?" Rantaro agrees quietly. He peers over at Shuichi and then at Himiko, who is sound asleep nearby on the blankets. "I think giving everyone a warning would be nice but...well, it looks like that might not be an option for a while."

"I don't think I can just sit around and watch though," Kaede admits, feeling restless. She wrings her hands together. "And even though the thought of going back honestly terrifies me a lot more than it should, I think maybe if I hype myself up enough then I'd be able to re-enter eventually."

Rantaro suddenly looks pensive. "Ah...I'm not sure if I like the idea of you going back inside." He wrinkles his nose. "What if you go back in and your, um, avatar is still poisoned." His voice starts to go quieter and quieter. "I think out of the two of us, I'd be the better choice."

"But..." Kaede's brows furrow tightly together. "You've already been through enough so-"

"Akamatsu, if anything, I've gotten off *lightly* compared to everyone else," Rantaro says. "I haven't had to go through anywhere near as much as some other people have had to. From the sounds of it, my death was pretty much instantaneous during the first game and I survived the second." He grimaces. "It just doesn't...seem fair that I get to sit around and observe the game from a safe distance when other people deserve to be here so much more than me right now."

Kaede frowns and steals Rantaro's attention by snatching up his hand. "Don't you *dare* say that you don't deserve to be here right now. You have every right to be outside of the game, just like everyone else. I'm *glad* that you survived."

The smile he gives her is bittersweet. "Even so, the biggest reason why I'm here right now is because Momota gave himself up for the two of us."

Kaede's eyes instantly start to sting and Rantaro suddenly looks guilty for pointing this fact out. "Yeah, I know..."

"I wasn't trying to make you feel guilty," Rantaro says. The corners of his lips twitch nervously. "Ah, I keep saying the wrong things today, huh? I wasn't trying to say Momota died because of us."

It's more so...everything happened so quickly. I know he isn't actually dead but..."

The guilt shared between them both is only something they both understand. Kaede squeezes his hand carefully, as if to communicate that she gets what he's getting at but doesn't have the right words to tell him so. When Rantaro squeezes her hand in return, she knows he understands.

There's a moment of silence as the two of them sit together hand in hand, backs pressed against the wall and their legs tangled in blankets. Kaede watches as the curtains dance with the wind.

"...did you know my file says I don't actually have twelve sisters?" Rantaro suddenly reveals quietly. His eyes are glassy and it looks like he's looking at something Kaede can't see.

"Apparently the person I was before all of this has a sister who *is* twelve but...yeah."

"Amami..."

"One of the biggest motivations I had to leave the game was to reunite with them all," Rantaro admits. His shoulders slump and he lets out a strained laugh. "Ah, I'm sorry. You don't need me going on about-"

"It's fine," Kaede says. "The game made me think I had a twin sister. It turns out I do have a sister, only she's not my twin and is a lot younger than me. It's really strange, isn't it? That we have families we don't even know."

"And the families we think we have aren't even real," Rantaro mumbles.

"Yeah..." Kaede desperately forces down the persistent lump in her throat as she mourns a family that was never hers to begin with.

—

She was under the presumption that everything would be okay for a couple of days at least. Kaede and Rantaro spend the next few of days resting and allowing themselves to build up their energy.

Their meals consist of energy bars and sweets that Kiibo had apparently taken from a nearby vending machine before Shuichi had locked the office. Kaede doubts that eating such food is going to help in the long run when it comes to building up strength but she supposes she can't be fussy.

She's scrunching up the wrapper of her rather pathetic dinner when Himiko stumbles from the monitor room looking pale and haunted. Kaede still hasn't had the chance to go inside since Maki has decided to basically live inside of the monitor room. The pianist realises she hasn't even had a single conversation with Maki yet.

"Yumeno? What's wrong?" Rantaro asks with a concerned frown on his face.

Himiko startles and her hands retreat into the sleeves of her hoodie as she curls into herself. She looks like she's about to burst into tears. "...Angie and Gonta died."

It's not the news Kaede was expecting. She feels all the hairs on her body stand up in alarm as her jaw drops open. "What?"

Himiko sniffles as she wipes her face frantically with her sleeves. It's painfully obvious that she's desperately trying to stop herself from crying but is failing spectacularly. "S-Shirogane got them killed. There was a time limit and..."

Kaede's heart skips a beat as Himiko brings up the time limit. Just thinking about time limits puts

her on edge. She's grateful that Rantaro quickly takes control of the conversation. "What do you mean that Shirogane got them killed? Does that mean she's dead?"

Himiko shakes her head bitterly. "She killed Angie and...blamed it on Gonta."

"She *what?*" Her ugly temper makes yet another appearance. "You mean-"

"She got away with murder," Himiko mumbles and slumps down onto the blankets with an exhausted whimper. "Because Monokuma likes turning a blind eye when it comes to kickstarting killing games."

Just like how Monokuma turned a blind eye when Tsumugi had poured poison down Kokichi's throat and allowed Miu to think she had killed him. Kaede feels her teeth grind together impatiently. "But I thought the time limit was supposed to last two days? What the hell happened?"

"It was reduced to twelve hours," Himiko reveals. "Because Momota kept arguing with Monokuma."

Rantaro rubs his head with a look of unfiltered disbelief in his eyes. "Unbelievable..."

"We need to re-join the game and tell everyone how to leave," Kaede decides. She doesn't care that she left her game on bad terms with Angie. Angie didn't deserve to get mixed up in Tsumugi's desire to start another killing game. The pianist spares a glance over at Angie's pod. Even though the artist is safe and very much alive in this room, there's something unnatural knowing that she's dead in a different sort of universe.

Shuichi, who is once again by the computer, lifts his head up when he hears Kaede say this and as expected, straight away says, "no one is allowed to re-join-"

"I can't just sit around and let more people suffer!" Kaede interjects before Shuichi even has the chance to finish. "Saihara, the suffering everyone goes through in the simulation is *real!* You do realise that, right?"

"*Of course I do!*" Shuichi looks surprisingly hurt by Kaede's words. "Which is *why* I can't let you go back in. Akamatsu, it's just too big of a risk to start jumping into simulations that are glitched."

"But you don't get to decide what risks I get to take," Kaede counters a little too impatiently. She crosses her arms. "I appreciate that you're only trying to keep us all safe but-"

"If you join and die then you'll just be fuelling the loops," Shuichi says and Kaede falters. When she fails to come up with an argument, Shuichi continues. "The more people that are in the simulation, the longer it will take to put an end to the loops. Akamatsu, I truly understand your desire to keep everyone safe, I do. I want to keep everyone safe too but if we all re-join and the wall isn't a viable exit anymore, we'd just be prolonging everyone's suffering."

That's enough for Kaede to abruptly snap her mouth shut. On one hand, he has a point. On the other, she wants him to try and be a little more optimistic because if it turns out the wall still does work as an exit then...

But maybe he's right. Until we're completely sure that the wall is a concrete exit then going back inside might be a mistake. I don't want to accidentally prolong all of this. Even if I do warn everyone about everything, that won't stop Monokuma and Tsumugi from simply killing everyone just so they can restart the whole process.

It's the doubt that clouds her mind that causes her to stand down. She sees the regret in Shuichi's

eyes, she practically sees it oozing from all of his pores. He looks like he hasn't slept in a very long time. The smudges under his eyes are as almost dark as his hair. When she looks at Shuichi, it doesn't feel like looking at a villain. It feels like looking at someone who is trying to take on the world.

Himiko snuffles again and Kaede is plucked from her thoughts. She spots Rantaro gently rubbing the magician's back as she barely manages to choke back sob after sob. Oh. Kaede didn't realise that Himiko was so close to Angie or Gonta, or perhaps she was only ever close to one of them. It makes her realise she's failed to get to know any of the three original survivors properly.

As Shuichi turns his attention back to the monitor, Kaede sheepishly makes her way back over to the blankets where Rantaro and Himiko are and sits down with them.

Himiko turns to face her when Kaede settles into the blankets. "I'm sad that they both died," Himiko says before pausing. "But I'm also really, really sad about Angie dying in particular. I know you probably don't like her very much because of...what she did during your game but during mine she was one of my best friends."

Kaede licks her lips when she realises how dry they've become. She has the sudden urge to feel disgusted with herself since it's clear Himiko is holding herself back from mourning Angie just because she thinks Kaede doesn't like her. "Yumeno, I don't hate Angie," Kaede responds softly. "I hate...what she did and I think for a while, I really didn't like her but..."

"If Angie was your friend then you're allowed to be sad about her dying," Rantaro says.

"It's not just Angie I'm upset about," Himiko admits. "I'm upset about everything and it feels so draining." She presses her palms into her eyes, as if she's trying to forcibly stop herself from crying. "I know she isn't *actually* dead but she still suffered a-and since she died again, she's going to forget everything *again*." Himiko swallows heavily. "A-And I hate that she isn't going to remember who I am once she leaves."

Rantaro and Kaede look at each other helplessly.

"I also hate that I *know* she isn't probably going to leave for a long time either," Himiko suddenly says. "Because Angie always tries to protect herself in all the wrong ways." She looks at Kaede guiltily. "I-I know she never meant to hurt Chabashira during your game but she still did and... Chabashira was also one of my best friends too."

Himiko's voice changes as she talks about Tenko. When she talks about Angie, she sounds like she's talking about a best friend that she made only recently. When she says Tenko's name, it sounds like she's talking about a dear best friend who she's had for a very long time. She talks about Tenko with unfiltered fondness.

"I miss my friends," Himiko says tiredly. "And I want to see them again so I can apologise for how I treated them during my game, especially Chabashira. I-I never got the chance to talk to her again before..."

There's an exhausted look in her eyes as she rubs the back of her neck absentmindedly.

Kaede feels her own fondness for Tenko grow as Himiko reminisces about the aikido master.

"Hey, you're going to get to talk to her again soon! Just try and remember that, okay? I know that things are really, really horrible right now but at least we know that although it might take a while, we'll be able to see everyone again one day."

“...nyeh, you’re right,” Himiko says with a wobbly smile. “Akamatsu, I’m really glad you were friends with Chabashira during your game. I was worried that she wasn’t going to have anyone to be friends with since she can be so intense sometimes.”

“Chabashira was my...” Kaede shakes her head. “No, she still *is* my dear friend and I don’t see that changing any time soon.” She hesitates before adding, “I’m, ah, really sorry I wasn’t nicer to Angie-”

“What Angie did wasn’t your fault,” Himiko responds. “I was angry with her for a little while too but it’s hard to stay mad at someone who you know is suffering.”

It seems Himiko has stopped crying. She cleans her face with her sleeve and gives both Rantaro and Kaede a very lazy smile.

“I’m glad that you’re both here,” Himiko admits. She cautiously checks on Shuichi before lowering her voice drastically. “It’s been nice to have people to actually talk to. I-It’s not like Saihara, Harukawa and Kiibo haven’t been talking to me but things have been...super hard.”

“Did...none of you talk much when you all woke up?” Rantaro asks carefully.

Himiko pauses before nodding. “Kiibo talks sometimes but, um, he doesn’t really talk about emotions since he doesn’t really understand how they work.” She wrinkles her nose. “Harukawa and Saihara just...never talk anymore. Harukawa keeps herself locked away in the monitor room and Saihara is always by the computer. Sometimes Saihara talks but...he’s kinda changed. During our last trial, he was super determined and positive. However, when we woke up...it’s like he’s reverted back to his original self.”

“Huh?” Kaede raises an eyebrow.

“He won’t look anyone in the eye,” Himiko practically whispers so Shuichi doesn’t overhear. “And he’s always so jumpy. I don’t think he knows but I heard him crying in the bathroom one night and...it really hurts to watch him struggle all on his own. I’ve tried to reach out to him but...”

“I take it he didn’t accept your help?” Rantaro asks.

Himiko nods. “Sometimes he talks to Harukawa but things have gotten tense between the two of them recently and things got even worse when your game ended.”

“That’s strange. Do you know why?” Kaede asks her.

“I think...” Himiko fiddles with the strings on her hoodie. “It has something to do with Momota. I heard his name a couple of times when they were arguing but since they were in a different room at the time, I never really heard what they were actually arguing about.”

“Kaito?” Kaede finds herself saying. She sucks in a sharp breath. “Are they upset that he gave his life up for us?”

“I’m not sure,” Himiko admits. She eyes the door to the monitor room. “Don’t tell Harukawa I told you this but sometimes I catch her watching footage of Momota. I think she really misses him since she...” Her voice is almost impossible to hear. “She had a crush on him.”

“Oh...” Kaede presses her lips together as she imagines Kaito and Maki together. She supposes she could see the two of them potentially getting together one day. Maybe if Kaito was around then Maki would be more mellow.

“She must’ve been devastated since he almost got out of our game alive,” Rantaro realises.

“Is that why she won’t talk to us?” Kaede ponders out loud.

“Maybe,” Himiko responds. “Harukawa has never been talkative in the first place. I wouldn’t even say I’m actually friends with her either. We just...both happened to survive the same killing game.”

Himiko looks over towards the monitor room wistfully and it hits Kaede how lonely Himiko must be feeling right now. She survived a game with two people who hardly talk to her and as nice as Kiibo is, Kaede doubts he’s the easiest person to talk to when you’re upset.

The magician squeaks as Rantaro suddenly ruffles her hair and she pouts, lifting her hands up to smooth down any loose strands. Rantaro chuckles as she does this. “Well like it or not, you’re stuck with us for the time being.”

“Ah, that’s right!” Kaede quickly agrees and pumps her fists. For the first time ever since she woke up here, she feels genuinely happy. “Even if we’ve only talked a couple of times, I already consider you my friend!”

“R-Really?” Himiko blinks before smiling softly. “Nyeh, your enthusiasm reminds me of Chabashira. She used to always be happy even when things were bad.”

“Well I think a part of her personality rubbed off on me since we spent quite a lot of time together,” Kaede admits with a giggle.

Himiko pauses before saying, “you got to do some of her neo aikido with her, right? Maybe you could, um, teach me some moves if you still remember them. I...” A longing look appears on her face. “I wish I had let her teach me how to do it when I was with her.”

“Oh!” Kaede claps her hands together. “I think I remember a little! Yeah, that sounds fun!”

“We can even use Amami as our training dummy,” Himiko says.

“Eh?” Rantaro smiles tightly as Kaede and Himiko giggle. “You’re joking, right?”

“Yeah,” Himiko answers and Kaede’s heart soars as the magician’s eyes sparkle with glee.

—

Kaede gets to enter the monitor room for the first time the next morning. Maki had left it looking rather irritated and plopped herself down onto the blankets without a word. When Kaede had tried to say something, the brown haired girl simply rolled over onto her other side so her back was visible.

The monitor room isn’t that big, although it has more space than the bathroom. There’s a couple of chairs in it, tucked neatly under wooden desks that protrude from the walls. Said walls are absolutely littered with monitors, all of them in perfect lines.

Kaede’s eyes go wide as she collapses into a seat and she hears Rantaro suck in a sharp breath behind her. Most of the screens are turned on and show various places around the simulation. On one monitor, she sees Kirumi cooking in the kitchen. On another, she sees Korekiyo brushing his hair as he looks into a mirror. Kaede swallows and swiftly moves on.

It feels like someone has punched her in the stomach hard when her eyes land on Kokichi and Kaito inside of Kirumi’s bedroom. The leader is in bed and despite the grainy quality of the

monitor, Kaede easily sees how dreadful Kokichi looks. Her brows furrow when she spots the first aid kit by his bed.

Kaede's last ever interaction with Kokichi had been holding him as he died in her arms. Despite the relief of seeing him alive once more, her relief is quickly replaced with concern.

"I wonder what happened?" Rantaro murmurs, placing his hand on Kaede's shoulder as he peers at the same monitor as her. "At least Momota seems to be keeping an eye on him, I guess. I wonder if he's ill?"

Kaede shakes her head and points to the first aid kit. "I don't think that's right."

"He was stabbed," Himiko suddenly says as she appears out of nowhere. Kaede almost jumps. "By Shirogane last night."

"Stabbed?!" Kaede pales.

"Don't worry, Tojo looked after him," Himiko reassures her. "So he should be fine."

"Geez, I swear Ouma is a magnet for trouble," Kaede sighs as she continues to look at all of the different monitors. It's so surreal seeing people inhabit the academy once more. Her eyes light up when she spots Tenko talking to Ryoma in the dining room. She notices Himiko pay close attention to that particular monitor too.

"Is there a way to hear what everyone is saying?" Rantaro asks. He looks around the room curiously and Kaede feels his fingers tap along her shoulder.

"Nyeh, I think so," Himiko says. "I think we just turned the audio off so everyone could have some privacy. I mean, I don't like the idea of someone listening in on my conversations so..."

Kaede notices a couple of monitors that have been turned off completely and points to them. "Hey, do these ones not work?"

"Ah..." Himiko's cheeks abruptly turn red. "Those are monitors for the, um, love hotel. Saihara turned those off himself personally. I never got enough coins to buy a key for it but Saihara did and he said that things can get...really...um..."

Rantaro's face scrunches up in disgust. "Why the hell are there cameras inside of a love hotel? That's so immoral."

Himiko shrugs helplessly. "I dunno."

Kaede sighs. "Well, at least Saihara turned them off."

She leans back heavily into her chair and drums her fingers along the desk. To her surprise, she notices that a monitor is showing Tsumugi's secret room. She then quickly realises that there's no reason for Tsumugi's room to be a secret outside of the simulation so she doesn't point it out.

So Maki has been spending most of her time here? Well, it certainly is interesting being able to watch everyone. However, with so many monitors around her, Kaede can't help but feel like some sort of stalker. The fact that she can see everyone at all times makes her feel rather uncomfortable, especially since no one in the simulation is aware that she's watching them right now.

Out of respect, she spins the chair around so she's no longer facing the monitors. "So is this what the audience can see too then? All of the different screens?"

“Oh I...don’t really know,” Himiko admits. “Since Danganronpa is a game show that is shown on television, I think only what the producers think is entertaining is shown. I think Kiibo mentioned something about how all the footage is usually edited down into an hour long episode. Nyeh, I wouldn’t want to be the person who has to do all of the editing.”

“Does that mean someone is editing all this footage as we speak?” Rantaro asks. He frowns. “I wonder if that’s even possible. Yumeno, do you know if this is the only room that shows what’s going on in the simulation?”

“I think so,” Himiko answers, although she does look a little uncertain. “That’s what Kiibo said anyway and I don’t think he would have any reason to lie.”

“Then what did Saihara mean when he said that people are still watching?” Kaede wonders. “Unless Team Danganronpa changed tactics and decided to livestream everything instead.”

“I-I dunno, I only know what Saihara told me,” Himiko responds.

“How would Saihara even know about all of this being potentially broadcasted in the first place?” Rantaro points out. “He said that he has only spoken with Team Danganronpa once and I presume that was when he had woken up. I highly doubt the first thing they said to him was that they’re going to continue recording the game.”

Himiko falls silent as her mouth morphs into a small circle. “I don’t know how to answer that either.”

“Maybe Kiibo knows something,” Kaede suggests.

“I don’t think Kiibo is hiding anything from us,” Himiko says. “He always answers everything honestly when he’s asked a question.”

“I don’t think he’s hiding anything,” Kaede says. “But I think I would perhaps like to know how everything works a little better. Hey, maybe Kiibo knows how to make it so that the audience can’t watch anymore? It creeps me out knowing that people are still watching.”

“I just don’t get *how* they’re still watching,” Rantaro mutters, more so to himself. “If Danganronpa is a pre-recorded show then that must mean it has predetermined slotted times to be put on television, right? If people are still watching then that means that...”

Kaede clasps her hands together nervously. “Amami?”

“Something isn’t right,” Rantaro tells her. “About the fact that there’s an audience still watching.”

“What’s not right?” Himiko asks. “I don’t think I understand.”

“It just seems kind of weird how the producers would create the fifty-third season and air it on television but then...” Rantaro frowns. “Well, the only way for all of this to make sense is to presume that the only possible way for the audience to watch the glitched games is via a livestream or something. I just don’t get *why* they would want the audience to know that the simulation has glitched and that unscripted killing games are happening. I would’ve thought Team Danganronpa would want their audience to see what they’ve scripted and nothing more. It’s a rather big gamble to take letting people watch something that is out of their control.”

“Now that you mention it...” Kaede narrows her eyes. “Yeah, you make a really good point. Why would Team Danganronpa risk their reputation by showing something completely unscripted? It kind of invalidates their scripted killing game by showing everyone alive again.”

“Yumeno, how certain are you that season-fifty three is over?” Rantaro suddenly asks.

“Nyeh?” Himiko worries her lip between her teeth. “I-I’m fairly confident that it ended with our game. I even heard some of the staff talk about how it was over when they came into the office.”

“Did they mention anything about live streaming the glitched games?” Kaede asks.

Himiko blinks and curls in on herself. “I-I really don’t know. I was really out of it whilst they were in the office. Um, why is this such a big deal anyway? Shouldn’t the audience be the least of our worries?”

Rantaro nods. “I mean, pretty much. That’s not what’s bothering me though.”

“Then what is?”

Rantaro clears his throat before answering, clearly apprehensive. “Is it possible that Saihara is merely mistaken about all of this being broadcasted?”

“Huh?” Kaede didn’t expect him to say that.

“I must admit, I was actually thinking that it’s possible that he’s lying about the audience still watching but...” Rantaro shakes his head. “I don’t think he’d lie about something like that for no reason, which is why I simply think he’s mistaken.”

“Wouldn’t Kiibo have corrected him by now if he is wrong though?” Kaede points out. “Since it seems Kiibo knows a lot more than us.”

“Maybe it’s that...” Rantaro frowns. “Kiibo is also mistaken about the audience too. Either way, I think it’s much more believable that the audience hasn’t been watching since the end of season fifty-three.”

“But how could Saihara be mistaken about all of this?” Himiko asks. “He’s really smart, like, really, really smart. T-That doesn’t mean I think he’s lying either. I just think...”

“Maybe we should just ask Saihara ourselves?” Kaede suggests as she makes her way out of the room. “If Amami tells him everything he told us then maybe Saihara will realise that he’s just been misinformed all this time-”

Kaede immediately stops in her tracks when she spots the scene in front of her. Kiibo has Shuichi’s arm slung over his shoulder and he’s leading the detective over to the chairs. Shuichi looks chalk white and his skin has a fine layer of sweat building on it. His eyes look hazy and unfocussed.

“Saihara?” Kaede gasps and makes her way over.

“I’m fine,” Shuichi murmurs as Kiibo lowers him onto a chair.

Kiibo doesn’t look impressed and turns to Kaede. “He’s not fine. He fainted.”

Kaede’s eyes go wide. “Really?”

“I’m fine, really,” Shuichi insists. He’s clearly lying as his entire body is shaking.

Kiibo sighs and it’s impressive how fed up he sounds. “Saihara, when was the last time you ate something?”

Shuichi blinks at the robot as if he’s just spoken in an entirely different language.

Kaede feels a hand tap her shoulder and she turns around. She meets Rantaro's guarded gaze and follows him when he heads back over to the monitor room.

"It's probably for the best that we wait a little while before asking Saihara anything," Rantaro says. "He's clearly not in the best place at the moment."

Kaede feels her chest tighten, feeling concern thrum through her veins. "It looks like he hasn't been looking after himself properly."

Seeing the detective look so vulnerable reminds Kaede of how messed up everything is at the moment. If Shuichi is getting himself into this sort of state then that must mean he's more worried than he's letting on.

Oh Shuichi, I wish you had said something earlier. I know you've been struggling. I just can't believe I didn't notice how much.

Kaede watches as Kiibo presses an energy bar into Shuichi's hand before sighing. And here she thought leaving the killing game would end all of her worries. How naïve of her.

—

Some days are easier than others. Today is a bad day.

Despite finding out that Kokichi has miraculously decided that he's going to take the wall out, Kaede still feels blue.

She sits by a window, feeling the breeze brush against her skin as she watches the outside world wordlessly. The building everyone is in is isolated, although there are a couple of other buildings scattered around nearby. Sometimes she sees people in the windows of other buildings. Sometimes she sees office workers leave the very building she's in, wearing black and white pins on their pristine uniforms.

It hurts knowing she doesn't belong anywhere outside of the office. In fact, it hurts knowing she doesn't belong in the very *world* she's in. When it's her and Rantaro and Himiko talking together in hushed whispers, she feels like she belongs. When she's alone with her thoughts, she feels like the only person who exists in the entire universe.

She finds herself mourning her fabricated family today. She mourns her mother, who had encouraged her to play piano. She mourns her father, who had went to every single one of her recitals. She mourns her twin sister, who she spent most of her life not knowing but still knew existed. Oh how ironic.

Kaede sometimes wonders what her actual family is like, the family who let her join Danganronpa in the first place. Maybe they tried to stop her. Maybe they just didn't care. Either way, however they reacted to her joining such a grizzly game show doesn't change the fact that she still managed to snag a spot as the protagonist. False protagonist.

She knows that everyone else misses their fake families too. Sometimes Rantaro will start telling a story about one of his sisters before his mouth snaps shut. Sometimes Himiko will talk about her master and her voice always stops working before she can finish.

Kaede sighs and rests her chin on her arms, which are pressed against the window ledge. It's cloudy outside and it makes Kaede realise that it was always sunny inside of the game.

"Can I sit with you?"

Kaede blinks as Shuichi occupies the chair that's next to hers. He looks a little better than he did the other day. There's colour in his cheeks and his hands no longer tremble. That's not to say he's completely better though. It still looks like something is eating away at him, although it's a struggle to figure out what.

Kaede hums out a positive response despite the fact that he's already sitting next to her. She eyes him curiously. This is the first time since she's seen him away from the computer. "Is everything okay, Saihara?"

"I...suppose things could be worse right now," Shuichi answers. He straightens his back, hands clasped tightly on his lap. "I'm, ah, sorry that it's taken this long for me to talk to you. I've not been actively ignoring you or anything! It's more so..."

"You've been under a lot of pressure lately," Kaede says. "I've noticed."

Shuichi smiles bitterly. "That doesn't excuse how I've been lately though. I shouldn't have yelled at you when you suggested going back into the simulation. It's just, well, to tell you the truth, the thought of going back inside terrifies me. Even just thinking about any of you going back in scares me too."

"It's fine, really," Kaede insists. "What you said about us prolonging the game if we go back inside made a lot of sense actually." She chuckles bashfully. "Maybe it's a good thing that there's at least some level headed people around. I think if neither you or Amami were here then I would've done something stupid by now."

"Nothing you do is ever stupid," Shuichi says. "And nothing you did in the past was stupid either."

"Really?" Kaede watches a grey cloud drift lazily in the sky. "Because I'm pretty sure setting up a trap to murder someone right in front of one of my only friends was a rather stupid thing to do."

"Ah, so you read about that in your file," Shuichi murmurs.

"Yeah..." Kaede grimaces. "I can't believe I actually did that."

"You had no control over your actions," Shuichi firmly retorts. "Everything that happened during the first game was scripted."

Kaede sighs. "It's just so weird knowing that we're not, like, actually people. That everything we think we know is fake. It's also really creepy knowing that for a time, I wasn't in control of myself, that someone scripted out my every thought and move..."

"It's really overwhelming, isn't it?" Shuichi says. He watches as a bird flies by. "I just, ah, wanted to make sure you weren't blaming yourself for anything that happened in the game. Well, I know you don't remember the original but..." He awkwardly trails off and looks like he wants to be literally anywhere else.

"It hurts knowing I killed Amami," Kaede admits. She pulls a face when Shuichi raises an eyebrow. "Huh? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Akamatsu, did you finish your file?" Shuichi asks. He suddenly looks pensive. "Did you...not read the part where it was said that you were set up?"

"Huh?!" Kaede suddenly wants to find her file and read through it word by word. "What do you mean?"

Shuichi pauses before letting out a shuddery sigh. “Akamatsu, you never killed Amami. You almost did but...your trap didn’t work properly. Amami was killed by Shirogane in the original game, not you.”

“B-But...” Kaede feels lost for all of two seconds before gritting her teeth. Oh. It’s startling how she’s not even surprised. Tsumugi has already proved, for a third time in a row now apparently, that she’s always going to be the catalyst when it comes to starting killing games. “...even now, she’s still finding ways to ruin my day.”

“I’m sorry, I thought you already knew,” Shuichi says. The bags under his eyes start to look a little more prominent all of a sudden. “I just keep...screwing things up lately. Saying the wrong things. Keeping you all in here without even asking. Failing to keep everyone safe-”

“Woah, woah, woah! Hold on just a second!” Kaede’s hair whips her fair as she spins to face him. “You’re seriously not blaming yourself for everything, right? Saihara, no one here is expecting you to fix...whatever the hell this entire mess is!”

Shuichi shakes his head. “Akamatsu, *I’m* the entire reason everyone is in this mess in the first place.” He takes in a trembling breath. “I vowed to end Danganronpa and I failed. Even though I thought I succeeded...”

“Did something happen in your game to make you feel this way? Saihara, everything was scripted, remember? So you can’t blame yourself-”

“Shirogane said in your game that the sixth trial wasn’t scripted though,” Shuichi points out. “So maybe if I had just tried a little harder...” He rubs his forehead. “Or maybe...ah, I don’t know anymore. I just really thought that I had succeeded. I truly thought that the entire world no longer wanted Danganronpa to exist...” He laughs bitterly.

“Maybe...maybe Shirogane lied about the sixth trial being scripted?” Kaede suddenly says. Shuichi looks at her in bewilderment. She steels herself. “If Danganronpa is some popular television show that is loved worldwide then why would Team Danganronpa risk their reputation by letting things play out naturally during the last trial? If anything, wouldn’t they double down on making sure the ending plays out perfectly?”

Shuichi puts a hand to his mouth and it looks like he’s deep in thought. “...it *is* possible that she lied but I don’t understand why she would. She sounded so confident that she was right.”

“Shirogane is a malicious liar who will literally get her hands dirty just to force games that shouldn’t even be happening in the first place,” Kaede tells him. “I’m not sure what happened during your sixth trial but it sounds to me like Team Danganronpa wanted you to think you had a chance at stopping everything when in reality...”

Perhaps the so-called audience everyone had argued with was also fake, just like everything else.

“No, I refuse to believe that,” Shuichi firmly says. “There *is* a way to stop all of this, I know there is.”

Kaede quietly looks away and goes back to observing the outside world. Ah. Perhaps she should ask Himiko or even Kiibo if there’s a script of the fifty-third killing game available so she can catch herself up with everything that happened. With what she knows right now, she’s not sure she can help Shuichi any further.

He’s surprisingly hellbent on continuing his fight against Danganronpa. She can see the raw

determination in his eyes. He looks like he'd give up everything just to put a stop to the killing games. Whilst it's admirable, Kaede wonders if such a feat is possible.

If Danganronpa is as beloved as everyone is making it out to be, taking on Danganronpa itself would be the same as taking on the entire world.

As Shuichi glares up at the dark clouds, looking irritated by something, Kaede suddenly realises something.

It's been days yet I've not seen a single member of Team Danganronpa. There's something odd about that. Someone should've checked in on us by now at the very least.

Kaede leans back in her chair as her previous feeling of sadness is morphed into worried curiosity.

—

It's during the early hours of the morning when something unexpected happens. Kaede is lying on her blanket, hands resting on her stomach as Rantaro sleeps next to her.

The lights are always turned off at night since it's easier to sleep in the dark. Kaede had fallen asleep straight away this particular night when something had woken her up.

She keeps her eyes closed as she hears the unmistakable sound of a door creaking open. See, this wouldn't be an issue but Kaede has already familiarised herself to the sound of both the monitor and bathroom doors. They both open silently. The door she hears open *creaks* and there's only one door she hasn't heard open yet in the office.

There are footsteps, indicating that someone has come into the room and the door closes. Kaede waits with bated breath for something dramatic to happen.

Only, nothing does.

She stays awake all night, waiting for whoever had entered to leave.

They don't.

—

The next morning, Kaede counts everyone in the room and sees that everyone is present, which can only mean one thing.

Despite Shuichi's insistence that everyone is to stay in here until further notice, someone has been leaving the office.

Chapter End Notes

I only intended for Kaede to be the temporary protagonist for this single chapter (not to say that she won't get to be protag again for a later chapter) but as seen, I've decided to split this segment of the story into two chapters since this chapter was getting too long. I still have a lot more I want to cover regarding Kaede waking up in the office, which will be tackled in the next chapter!

Interlude - Part 2

Chapter Notes

First off, thank you all so much for 900+ kudos!!! It really means so much to me that so many people are enjoying my story!!! :)

Sorry for the slight delay, I don't have as much free time as I used to so writing has become a lower priority of mine. I'll try my best to update as frequently as I can though ahaha

Sorry if there are any mistakes! I hope you all enjoy my writing!!!

“You think someone has been leaving the office?”

Kaede nods before swallowing the last of her energy bar. “I know what I heard, Amami. Someone has definitely been leaving the office whilst everyone else is sleeping.”

“Huh.” Rantaro leans back on the office chair he’s sat on. The two of them are currently inside of the monitor room with the door firmly shut. The monitor behind Rantaro shows Kokichi and Kiibo talking in the leader’s bedroom. Or more so arguing. Kaede can’t tell and she isn’t about to turn the audio on to find out. Maki is the only one who willingly listens in on conversations, claiming she only does so when she sees something suspicious. “But didn’t-”

“Saihara say that no one is allowed to leave? Yeah, he did.”

Rantaro frowns. “And you’re completely sure it was the office door you heard open? Not the bathroom or this one?” He points to the monitor room door.

“I heard it *creak* and those doors don’t make any noise!” Kaede insists. She knows what she heard and she’s not sure how she feels about it. Even thinking about leaving the office makes her feel like she’s doing something wrong. She’s not sure if this is the first time someone has left the office but something tells her that this might be more of a regular occurrence than she thinks it is. “You believe me, don’t you?”

“Of course I do,” Rantaro says. He kicks the floor so the office chair starts to spin ever so slightly. “I’m just wondering who has been leaving. It seems pretty convenient that they’re only leaving when they think everyone else is asleep, right?”

“I understand that staying in the office all the time must be hard but it’s a little unfair that someone might be putting us all at risk,” Kaede mutters. “I mean, no one has really expanded on the reason why we’re not allowed to leave but with how panicked Saihara looks every time someone gets a little too close to the door...”

“Saihara always looks panicked,” Rantaro points out before sighing. “Doesn’t the office door also have a lock on it? That means whoever has been leaving has access to the keys, although I don’t actually know who looks after them.”

“Well we know Saihara had them at one point since he was the first person to lock the door,” Kaede says as she starts to count on her fingers. “And it wouldn’t surprise me if Kiibo has access

to them too or at the very least knows where they are.”

“As for Harukawa...” Rantaro rubs his chin. “We don’t really know a lot about her other than the fact she spends a lot of time in this room. Every time I’ve seen her sleep it’s usually been during the day so it seems she’s usually more active during the night.”

“I don’t think Yumeno has been leaving,” Kaede admits. “If anything, I don’t think she fully knows what’s going on. At least that’s the impression I get from her anyway.”

“That’s what I think too. If I had to pick a potential suspect, it would be out of Saihara, Kiibo and Harukawa.”

Kaede rubs her arm soothingly with her thumb as she tries to think through all the different possibilities. She doesn’t like the thought that she has to doubt one of those three. She was under the impression that whilst things are tense, everyone trusts each other. Apparently she’s wrong about that.

She could easily spend the entire day speculating who the culprit is but the more she thinks about doing so, the more she realises she’s sick of having to doubt her friends. It was hard enough being in a killing game and blindly hoping that you’d make it through the night alive. She thought she was done with doubting people. It makes her sick to her stomach that she has to be wary once more.

Rantaro quickly notices her discomfort and offers her a reassuring smile. “Hey, all of this could just be one big misunderstanding, you know? For all we know, maybe it’s safe to leave during the night and someone just wanted to stretch their legs?”

“Or what if it’s something more serious?” Kaede counters. “I don’t want to always have to jump to the worst conclusion but there’s something not right about all of this. If we’re allowed to leave then someone should’ve told us by now.”

Rantaro smiles grimly. “Then what do you propose we do? I doubt we’re going to get any answers if we confront everyone head on.”

He’s probably right. Shuichi will probably clam up whilst Kiibo will just dance around the answer. Maki might say something but there’s also an equal chance she might choose to stay silent too. Kaede groans and massages her temples. “I haven’t really thought about that yet.”

“We could just pretend to sleep and catch the culprit out when the time is right?” Rantaro suggests. He spins around in his chair with a thoughtful look on his face. “That seems like the most logical thing to do.”

“Another stake-out, huh?” Kaede’s eyes shine with amusement. “Remember the last time we decided to do a stake-out? Both of us fell asleep and Ouma was the only one who stayed awake.”

“Oh yeah,” Rantaro murmurs. “We all stayed in the library together.”

The next morning Rantaro had become wary of both Kaede and Kokichi since Monokuma had made a tragic return. Of course at the time, none of them knew that Tsumugi had brought the bear back. Kaede picks at a loose thread on her shirt absentmindedly. It’s funny how much trust has been built between herself and Rantaro since then.

“Maybe we can take it in shifts?” Rantaro says. “You sleep for a couple of hours whilst I keep an eye out then I sleep for a couple of hours whilst you keep an eye out?”

“Yeah, that could work,” Kaede responds. “Although from the sounds of things, maybe we won’t have to worry about all of this if Ouma does manage to take down the wall soon.”

“Do you really think he can?” Rantaro asks before pulling a face. “You know, the more I think about it, the more I wonder why we never just tried to break the wall ourselves when we were in the game. I mean, how hard can it be to break some glass?”

“To be honest, I think I got so used to the wall I just automatically thought it couldn’t be broken,” Kaede admits. “But I think you’re being a little too optimistic. I doubt it’s just any old glass.”

Rantaro hums. “You’re probably right. Still, didn’t Kiibo say he managed to break it?”

“Oh yeah, he did,” Kaede says. Her eyes flicker over to the monitor. “And he’s talking to Ouma right now. Maybe the wall might be taken down sooner than I thought.”

“Hopefully before another murder happens,” Rantaro adds quietly.

Learning that no one actually dies when they pass away in the simulation is a revelation Kaede still hasn’t completely gotten her head around. The more she thinks about it, the more hollow she feels. Whilst it’s a good thing that no one has truly died, everyone loses their memories and that... almost feels like it’s on the same wavelength as dying.

People are made up of memories and it surprises her it has taken her this long to realise this.

The satisfaction of knowing everyone will eventually leave the game alive is overrun by the knowledge that not a single person who wakes up is going to know who I am. Kokichi won’t remember sitting in the library with Rantaro and I. Miu won’t remember purposefully picking a different meal for me to eat so I wouldn’t get poisoned. Tenko won’t remember that she kept me going. Kirumi won’t remember she was a perfect maid right until the very end. Korekiyo won’t remember all the new research he accumulated. Ryoma won’t remember how he kindly gave up his lab for me. Angie won’t remember anything she did. Gonta won’t remember how much of a perfect gentleman he was. Kaito won’t remember...how he gave up his life for both Rantaro and I...

Kaede spares a final glance at the monitors once more and feels her hands curl into fists. She hates how there isn’t anything she can do for anyone at the moment. The hatred feels like poison that runs through her veins, causing her entire body to feel numb yet tense at the same time.

I hope to anyone who is listening that Kokichi manages to break down that wall as soon as possible. The sooner all of my friends are out of this hellish loop cycle, the better.

—

Kaede is sitting by the window when Himiko leaves the bathroom, her hair wet around her shoulders. The pianist frowns slightly as she notices that the smaller girl doesn’t have a towel around her shoulders. Himiko’s hair also looks messy, as if she washed it too harshly. To Kaede’s surprise, Himiko slumps onto her pile of blankets instead of doing anything to fix her hair.

She hesitates before heading over to the mage, chewing her lip as she notices the tired look in Himiko’s eyes. Despite just coming out of the shower, Himiko doesn’t look refreshed at all. If anything, she looks more exhausted than usual.

“Yumeno...are you okay?” Kaede asks carefully, kneeling down next to her.

Something bothers her about the fact that Shuichi doesn’t even turn around from his computer when she asks this. Hell, even the door to the monitor room is cracked open and Kaede knows

Maki can probably hear her.

“Nyeh...” Himiko looks at her quietly before sighing. “Hmm? Yeah, I’m just...”

“You’re going to get sick if you sit around too long with wet hair,” Kaede frets.

Himiko blinks at her slowly. “I’ll sort it out later.”

“But...” Kaede pauses before putting a hand on the girl’s shoulder. “Wait here for just a second, okay? I’ll be right back.”

Himiko tilts her head to the side as Kaede ventures off into the bathroom and searches the small room. She emerges with a white towel and a hairbrush. The pianist hums as she carefully drapes the towel around Himiko’s shoulders, ignoring the loose droplets of water that drip onto her fingertips. The mage is quiet throughout all of this, although Kaede can’t help but notice how tense Himiko’s shoulders are.

“Is it okay if I brush your hair?” Kaede asks, holding up a hairbrush. “It’s, ah...”

“Really knotted?” Himiko finishes for her, clearly not embarrassed by the state of her hair. When Kaede nods bashfully, Himiko sighs. “I ran out of mana-” She clears her throat. “Energy when I got out of the shower so I couldn’t be bothered to sort out my hair.”

“Then let me fix it for you!” Kaede feels like Himiko has noticed how overly enthusiastic she’s trying to be but isn’t saying anything. She hums as she starts to carefully sort Himiko’s hair out, strategically figuring out where to brush first so she doesn’t cause the mage any discomfort.

“You don’t have to do this,” Himiko murmurs. Kaede can’t see her face but she can easily imagine Himiko wearing a small pout. She tends to pout a lot when she’s fed up or tired. “I know sitting around with damp hair isn’t the smartest thing to do but...I’m just too tired to sort it out right now.”

Kaede pauses before continuing to run the brush through Himiko’s damp hair. “I don’t mind helping you out, Yumeno.” She slows down as she reaches a particularly stubborn knot and tackles it delicately. “In fact, I’m actually finding this really fun!”

“Nyeh?”

Kaede giggles bashfully as she slowly eases the knot apart. “I never really had many girl friends growing up. Because I was so obsessed with playing the piano, I never had the chance to actually make some proper friends. Whilst everyone else was hanging out with each other and having sleepovers, I was working my fingers to the bone playing piano.”

Well, that’s what she was made to remember anyway. Before she becomes too bitter, Kaede clears her throat loudly and continues. She weaves her fingers gently through Himiko’s hair, letting out a satisfied hum as she manages to untangle the first knot.

“I’ve always wondered what it would be like to have a girly sort of sleepover,” Kaede admits. She catches the towel with her brush and readjusts it accordingly. “You know, staying up late eating junk food and sharing secrets. In hindsight, I really should’ve taken the chance to make more friends when I had the chance. Everyone at my school knew me, of course, since I was so famous but it’s not like anyone *knew me*, knew me, if you get what I mean?”

“I...think I do,” Himiko says. She rolls her shoulders and stifles a yawn. “It’s sort of weird finding out you never had many friends growing up. You seem like the type of person who is friends with everyone.”

Kaede laughs loudly and stops herself when she almost tugs too hard on a clump of hair. "I've always been told that I'm friendly! Well, sometimes a little too straightforward but..." She rubs her cheek bashfully. "When you devote all of your time to honing a specific talent, you tend to brush aside things like making friends. In fact, waking up inside of the school with you all was the first time I..." Kaede concentrates on a random strand of Himiko's hair. "I actually had the time to sit down and actually talk to people."

"That's really surprising," Himiko responds quietly. "With how...confident you always sounded, I thought you just naturally had a lot of friends. Everyone seemed to like you right away."

"Really?" Kaede feels something soothing blossom in her chest.

"Oh yeah, you don't remember the first game," Himiko realises. She looks over her shoulder with a tiny smile. "You got on with pretty much everyone, or at least tried to. Honestly, you were kind of exhausting to deal with since you could get a little intense sometimes but it was nice to have someone as reliable as you leading us for a while."

Himiko's words leave Kaede breathless for a second before she smiles warmly. The mage turns back around so Kaede can continue fixing her hair. Despite her earlier reluctance, Himiko seems to enjoy being helped. Kaede continues to carefully run the brush through her hair. "Really?"

"I think if you weren't around when everyone woke up then the group probably would've fallen apart," Himiko says. "Or at the very least, Momota would've tried to take charge and as reliable as he makes himself out to be, he probably would've gotten himself killed. He tried to punch Monokuma a couple of days in, you know?"

For some reason, Kaede can easily imagine Kaito trying to throw fists with Monokuma. The mental imagery makes her giggle but when she catches Maki glaring at her through the crack of the door from the corner of her eye, she decides to stifle her laughter as soon as possible. "I think we all have wanted to punch Monokuma at some point."

"I should've cast a sleeping spell on him," Himiko grumbles. She suddenly sucks in a sharp breath. "Well...I would've if I knew how to use magic..."

"Ah..." Kaede hesitates and remains silent as she gets rid of the final knot in Himiko's hair. She starts to brush it slowly. "Yumeno, I'm sorry if I'm asking anything too personal but why are you so insistent that you're not magic? I mean, you're the Ultimate Magician-"

"Mage," Himiko quickly interjects before gasping. "I-I mean I'm not. That's just...who I thought I was."

"Well, you still are technically the Ultimate Mage, just like how I'm still the Ultimate Pianist," Kaede says. "It's Himiko Yumeno who is the Ultimate Mage, right? And you're her so you shouldn't deny yourself your talent just because of the situation we're in."

"I just don't think it's that easy," Himiko admits helplessly. She lowers her voice. "I know who I'm supposed to be but it's just been so hard accepting the truth that we're all not supposed to exist. How am I supposed to enjoy being the Ultimate Mage when I might not get to be her forever? I like doing magic and I don't want to ever stop being a mage. I'm just worried that everything will be taken away from me soon."

Sometimes, Kaede often wonders what sort of person she was before all of this. She was someone who wanted to join a killing game. She, along with millions of other people, wanted to join a completely different world. Kaede doubts the old version of herself took into consideration what

her character wants, what Kaede wants.

The more I think about it, the more cruel all of our fates are. It's absolutely mind boggling that Team Danganronpa has the ability to basically create brand new people. It's even more ludicrous that they have the heart to cast us all aside once we're fulfilled our roles. There's something about all of this that makes me sick to my stomach.

"I...I get what you mean," Kaede says. She continues to brush Himiko's hair despite the fact that it's fine now. "Of course I don't want to just...*disappear*. It scares me knowing that there's a high possibility that I might be turned into a completely different person once again some time soon but..."

"I'm kind of glad we're all trapped in here," Himiko suddenly reveals. "I mean, I'm not entirely sure why Saihara doesn't want us to leave but nothing bad has happened to any of us yet so I think as long as we stay in this office, we'll be safe."

Kaede swallows and feels her fingers tense. She doesn't want to press too hard for answers but since Himiko was the one who brought up the whole office situation, Kaede doesn't feel as guilty as she thought she would when she asks, "so do you not know why Saihara won't let us leave?"

"It's not just Saihara," Himiko says. "Kiibo also thinks we shouldn't leave either. I think even Harukawa has said that we're better off here than anywhere else." She huffs and rests her forehead on her knees. "Sometimes it feels like I'm being left out. Those three always seem to be on the same wavelength yet I feel like I'm completely clueless. Saihara and Harukawa were friends in our game so of course I expect them to confide in each other but for them to talk to Kiibo but not me? I don't know what I've done wrong."

The mage's voice gets quieter and quieter as she speaks and occasionally, it wobbles. Kaede feels a crease grow between her brows as she eyes both Shuichi and Maki. They're both so absorbed in watching their own monitors that she doubts they even realise that Himiko is upset right now. She can't fault Kiibo for not saying anything since he's on standby mode and since Rantaro is currently sleeping, she can't turn to him for help.

"I don't think you've done anything wrong," Kaede whispers. She decides that since she's done brushing Himiko's hair, she'll play with it instead. She starts to braid a couple of strands together clumsily. "I just think that both Saihara and Harukawa have different ways of coping and I unfortunately get the impression that neither of them are very sociable."

"But they talk to each other," Himiko points out sadly. "And they talk to Kiibo. Harukawa always says she's too busy when I try to talk to her and Saihara only lasts a couple of seconds before he becomes too distracted to continue."

"I..." Kaede helplessly flounders as she finishes the braid that she's working on. She watches it unravel.

"They always go into a different room to talk too so I can't hear," Himiko adds. "They don't even make it obvious that they don't want me to hear them. None of them want me to hear what they're saying. At least Kiibo tries to be polite about it and says he only talks to them privately because he's talking to them about personal things."

Kaede realises that Himiko is probably venting out weeks worth of frustration. She quietly listens, wiping her damp fingers on the towel on Himiko's shoulders so they don't prune.

"I just thought that since we survived the same game, that would make us at least friends," Himiko

admits. Her hands curl tightly around her legs and the mage's voice starts to muffle as she presses her face further into the grey joggers she's wearing. "Things were nice for the first couple of days but then Harukawa started to spend more and more time in the monitor room and Saihara suddenly stopped even trying. I was the one who had to start conversations with everyone. Kiibo sometimes talks but...it just feels like he talks to me just to be polite, not because he wants to."

"Have you told him this?" Kaede asks. Shuichi and Maki seem to be in a different category compared to Kiibo. Kaede feels somewhat relieved that Kiibo at least has been trying to make an effort. However, with how cagey everyone else has been...it's no wonder Himiko is so worried.

"I-I don't want to make him feel guilty," Himiko says. "I understand that everyone is under a lot of pressure and we're all still recovering from finding out something so...horrible. It's just...I don't know if I'm the unreasonable one for wanting just a little more out of everyone."

"You don't have to feel guilty for feeling lonely," Kaede tells her. She feels this protective urge to shield Himiko away from everything. How on earth have both Shuichi and Maki not noticed how down the mage is? She gets that everyone is suffering but this just seems a little too far. At the very least, Shuichi seems like the type of person who would try to, at the bare minimum, make sure that his friends are okay.

Himiko sniffs and Kaede nibbles on her own lip nervously. "I'm just sick of all of this. I want to go home but I don't even know where home is anymore. I-I...I don't know where I'm supposed to go once we actually get out of here."

That's something Kaede has purposefully been avoiding thinking about. Her file includes her real family and the address she used to live at. However, all of the family names she put down and the street where her house is might as well be written in a different language since she doesn't recognise a single person or address. She thinks she can vaguely recognise the street name and that's only because the Danganronpa World she was a part of copycats the real world somewhat.

She desperately wants to be able to give the comfort Himiko clearly needs. She wants to tell her that everything is going to be okay, that they'll all be able to find somewhere called home soon. However, filling Himiko's head up with fanciful lies just feels wrong. It's nice to have an end goal but Kaede doesn't want to cross the line when it comes to fiction and reality. God, she's dealt with *enough* fiction already.

However, Kaede supposes she can start small and hope that her tiny wish of leaving this place with all of her friends will snowball into something beautiful. "I think we'll all find somewhere to go," Kaede tells her and a small part of her hopes that saying her hopes out loud will make them come true. "And I'd like to think everything will turn out okay. If I can't believe in a positive outcome then what can I believe in?"

Himiko stays quiet for a couple of moments and Kaede wonders if she said the wrong thing. Then, just when Kaede is about to apologise for making things awkward, Himiko starts talking again. "You sounded like Momota there for just a second."

"Did I?" Kaede supposes that is a compliment. She feels the corners of her lips twitch up. "Well, I am his sidekick, you know?"

Himiko makes a confused noise before her body jolts with realisation. "Oh yeah, you are. Sorry, I almost forgot. I remember Saihara and Harukawa being his sidekicks but I almost forgot about you."

"I don't think I can possibly forget," Kaede says with a shudder. "My arms still hurt thinking about

all of the press ups he made me do.”

Himiko sounds vaguely amused. “I’ve only done press ups once in my entire life and that was with everyone else after...” Her voice trails off. “After Momota died. There were only five of us left. Saihara, Harukawa, Kiibo, myself and...Shirogane.”

“Did you all exercise together?”

Himiko nods. “Well, Kiibo wasn’t there since he was busy but everyone else did. We had such a bad day and, um, we only trained for a little while but that was the last time we were all a little bit happy before things went bad again.”

So her last happy memories were hanging out with Shuichi, Maki and Tsumugi? The revelation makes the whole situation of Shuichi and Maki ignoring Himiko even worse. Himiko must’ve cherished her time with them more than they both realise. It makes Kaede want to shake them both until they see sense.

They’re both Kaito’s sidekicks for crying out loud! If he saw them now then I know he wouldn’t be pleased! Did they not learn anything from him?

“I’m sorry for making things so awkward,” Himiko suddenly says. “And I’m sorry that you had to brush my hair for me. I truly just...felt too exhausted to even grab a hairbrush.”

Kaede hums as she shakes her head. “You don’t have to apologise, Yumeno. In fact, I want to make it clear that you can turn to me for help whenever you want, okay? With absolutely *anything*! If you want to talk then I promise I’ll respond and if you’re ever too tired to do anything then I’ll try to help any way I can!”

“Oh...” Himiko sounds surprised by her words. It takes the mage a couple of attempts but she eventually manages to choke out a very wobbly, “thank you.”

“What are friends for?” Kaede says as she unwraps the towel from Himiko’s shoulders and bundles it up into her arms.

“Friends...” Himiko mumbles the word as if it’s something she’s never said before. Then, she smiles. “Nyeh, it sounds so weird saying it out loud but, um, it’s actually really nice hearing you say that we’re friends. Thanks, Akamatsu.”

“Ah! You can call me Kaede if you want!” Kaede offers before quickly backpedalling. “You know, because we’re friends!”

“Then you have to call me Himiko,” Himiko counters.

“Okay then...*Himiko*.” Her name rolls from Kaede’s tongue naturally.

The two girls share a smile and Kaede is about to say something else when a very distant shout distracts her. Himiko looks as worried as she feels as the two of them look around for the source of the shout. It sounded panicked, *scared* even. Kaede feels all of the hairs on her arms stand up tall. Where did that shout come from?

Then she hears another shout, this one sounding even more panicked. This time she’s able to figure out that the shouting is coming from the monitor room of all places. Kaede nervously approaches the door and notices Maki staring intensely at the screens with a deep frown on her face. She must’ve turned the sound back on.

“Shirogane? Shirogane, come back! You can’t just leave me down here!”

“Is that...*Ouma*?” Himiko asks, sounding shocked.

Before Kaede can answer, Maki snaps her head in their direction and slips from the chair. She leaves the room, making sure that the door is firmly shut. She barges past the two girls silently.

“H-Harukawa, what’s going on?” Himiko asks. She sounds upset. “Why is Ouma shouting? What happened-”

“Kiibo died in the game,” Maki says and Kaede feels her heart sink.

“Does that affect him outside the game at all-”

“Of course it doesn’t,” Maki responds impatiently. “But I want to tell him what happened so he isn’t too confused when he notices that he’s not around in the simulation anymore.”

Maki’s cold response makes Kaede shiver. She doesn’t even sound phased. “What’s wrong with Ouma-”

“So you heard the shouting?” Maki mutters, more so to herself. She turns away from the pianist and mages dismissively. “Nothing for either of you to worry about. He’s fine. Unfortunately.”

Kaede gapes at her. *“Unfortunately?!”*

Maki clicks her tongue. “I was being sarcastic-”

“H-He sounded really scared,” Himiko intervenes, clasping her hands to her chest. “Are you sure that he’s-”

“He’s alive,” Maki says. “So don’t turn this into a big deal, okay?”

“Well of course this is a big deal! Kiibo is *dead*!” Kaede points out. “Do you know who killed him?” Translation: which one of her friends is going to be punished and forced into another game?

“Shirogane,” Maki answers bluntly. “And I doubt Monokuma is going to punish her. From what I’ve gathered, she’s going to make out Kiibo’s death was just an accident so...”

Kaede finds no relief in Maki’s words. She slumps against the wall and runs a hand through her hair. “I thought Ouma was taking down the wall tonight?”

To Kaede’s bewilderment, Shuichi turns his head and looks over at everyone. “Did something happen?”

Oh, so he’s completely deaf when Himiko needs support but the moment I bring up Kokichi and the wall and he’s suddenly alert? There’s something about Shuichi’s apparent selective hearing that makes Kaede want to grind her teeth into dust.

“The wall is still up,” Maki says. “Monokuma and Shirogane swapped all of the weapons out with toys and Ouma didn’t realise until the last second like an absolute dumbass. Kiibo was with him and some things happened. They both ended up falling down some stairs and Shirogane decided to just shut Kiibo down. She probably wants another class trial-”

“Both of them fell down the stairs?” Himiko asks. “Is Ouma okay-”

“He’s alive,” Maki once again says. “So there’s no point worrying about him.”

“He fell down the stairs! He probably sustained some sort of injury!” Kaede insists. Maki’s blunt answers are starting to frustrate her. “Can you at least try to sound like you care? It’s good that he’s alive but-”

“I need to tell Kiibo what happened,” Maki says, completely ignoring her. “And then I need to talk to Saihara so stop complaining and get out of my way.”

Kaede is surprised her jaw doesn’t drop to the floor as Maki wordlessly walks past them both so she can reach Kiibo and Shuichi, who are on the opposite side of the room. Is Maki usually this rude or is this just a one off? Either way, Kaede feels frustration bubbling under her skin.

Is this what Himiko has been putting up with? No wonder she’s so reluctant to even try to talk to Maki and Shuichi anymore.

“See what I mean?” Himiko whispers when Maki is out of earshot. “They always talk to each other but not to me. I thought maybe it was because they see me as a kid but if Harukawa also doesn’t want to involve you then...”

“I thought they weren’t talking to you for...more personal reasons,” Kaede grumbles. “This is absolutely unacceptable.” She’s tempted to give Maki a piece of her mind when a small hand wraps around her wrist. Kaede blinks. “Huh?”

“If you go over then they’ll just stop talking and wait until you’re gone. There’s no point,” Himiko tells her.

“But there’s something suspicious about all of this,” Kaede says. Not so much so about Maki wanting to tell Kiibo about what happened in the game. Kaede is more focussed on the fact that Maki clearly wants to talk to Shuichi alone. “Don’t you want to know what they’re hiding from you?”

“I...” Himiko sighs tiredly. “I don’t think I really care anymore.”

Kaede watches with narrowed eyes as Maki wakes Kiibo up. There’s something about all of this that disgusts her and she’s not sure what. All that she knows is that she’s confident that something isn’t right and she wants to know what.

—

No one leaves the office during the night and Kaede isn’t sure what to think of this. Kiibo, whilst claiming he doesn’t experience any emotions, did seem rather put off when Maki told him he had died in the simulation. Maybe the reason why no one left was out of respect for him.

It’s currently late into the afternoon and Kaede finds herself sitting in a small circle with Himiko and Rantaro. Earlier, Rantaro had found some nail polish hidden in a bag in the bathroom and his entire face had lit up as if he was a child during Christmas. He’s currently painting Himiko’s nails a subtle green. When Rantaro had asked why that colour in particular, clearly curious as to why Himiko picked such a surprising colour, she said it reminded her of Tenko.

Most of the morning was spent watching the class trial on the monitors. True to her word, Tsumugi made it so no one was punished but it had been almost torturous watching Kokichi bleed out on Kaito’s back the entire time. At one point, Kaede had been tempted to gate-crash the trial herself and reveal the truth. However, after a pointed look of warning from Maki, Kaede instead curled her hands into fists and concentrated on the feeling of her nails making crescent shaped dents into her palms.

“It kind of tickles,” Himiko admits as Rantaro finishes off her index finger. She squirms as he moves onto her middle finger.

Rantaro is careful as he paints, his tongue sticking out the corner of his mouth as he concentrates. Kaede scarcely holds back a giggle and can’t help but find the look on his face rather endearing.

“Just try to keep still,” Rantaro tells her, although there’s no irritation in his voice. Rather, he actually sounds incredibly pleased and it’s easy to tell that he’s having fun. “But if you think you’re going to make any movement then please try to warn me. I don’t want to get nail polish on your clothes.”

Kaede hums as she looks through the rest of the nail polish. She’s currently clutching onto a bottle of pale pink nail polish, although she can’t help but long for a bottle with sky blue nail polish inside too. Hmm, maybe the two colours would look good together if she gets Rantaro to alternate them on each nail.

Rantaro had boldly asked both Maki and Shuichi if they wanted to join in before they had started. Shuichi had merely shook his head whilst Maki stared at him as if he had just asked the world’s most stupidest question.

“There’s even this really nice red colour I think would suit you,” Himiko had said.

Maki had glared at her. “I don’t like red.”

“Oh.”

The pianist holds back a grimace and rolls the pink and blue polish around her hands quietly. Whilst it’s a little disappointing that the group isn’t completely united yet, she supposes she shouldn’t be too disheartened. Hanging out with Rantaro and Himiko has been fun. She even did some Neo-Aikido with Himiko before Rantaro found the nail polish.

“You know, it’s been really strange watching Chabashira hang out with so many boys,” Himiko suddenly admits.

“Yeah, she never really seemed to like them,” Kaede says. “But she seems to be getting on with her new little training group. It’s actually really nice to see.”

“It just comes to show that we don’t have to be defined by how Team Danganronpa wants us to act,” Rantaro points out. He moves onto the next finger slowly. “I’ll admit, it has been interesting seeing how everyone behaves without being controlled by a script.”

“Nyeh, well I think Chabashira has proved the script wrong by being friends with Momota, Hoshi and Ouma,” Himiko says. “I’m not saying I didn’t like how she acted during my game but I did wish she wasn’t so intense about hating boys. I’m glad that she’s actually fair towards them when she’s not being influenced.”

It probably helps that both Ryoma and Kaito have some connection to sport and exercise, meaning they have some common ground with Tenko. Admittedly, Tenko becoming friends with Kokichi was a surprise but Kaede supposes their friendship wouldn’t have kickstarted without Kaito. She’s glad that Kaito has found more people to take under his wing.

“Well Chabashira is a nice person deep down,” Rantaro says. “The Chabashira I knew was a caring person.”

“I don’t know what I would’ve done without her,” Kaede adds and smiles sadly. She wishes Tenko

had lived longer during her game. Her death was so sudden and sometimes Kaede thinks she hasn't completely processed what happened to her.

The glass bottles of polish clink together softly as she rolls them around her hands absentmindedly. She almost jumps when a hand brushes over one of her own and she lifts her head up to see Himiko looking at her with a concerned look on her face.

"Kaede, are you okay?"

"I'm fine!" Kaede quickly insists. "Sorry! I just started to overthink and..."

"You miss her," Himiko states, like it's the most obvious thing in the world. "Don't worry, I do too."

Kaede smiles but before she can say anything, she's suddenly hit with this feeling that she's being watched. She raises an eyebrow and looks over her shoulder and is more than surprised to see Kiibo watching the trio as he wrings his hands together. Her surprise morphs into genuine curiosity.

"Is there something wrong, Kiibo?" Kaede asks.

"Ah..." The robot's eyes flicker across all of the loose bottles of nail polish before landing on a shade of cyan. "I didn't know there was nail polish in the office."

"I found some bottles in the bathroom," Rantaro tells him as he finishes off Himiko's first hand. "There's nothing wrong with us using them, right?" His tone of voice suggests that he's not going to stop even if Kiibo tells him there *is* an issue.

"Oh, no, I don't think so," Kiibo responds. He hesitates and Kaede is confused at his peculiar behaviour. She supposes he could be mourning in his own way and it's not like she knows how robots process grief but she is finding it strange how he's staring down at the cyan nail polish so intensely.

"What's the matter?" Himiko asks, taking the words straight from Kaede's mouth.

Kiibo pauses before crouching down and picking up the cyan nail polish. "Maintaining your fingernails is a human activity, yes?"

"I mean..." Kaede looks down at her hands thoughtfully. "Yeah, I guess so. Painting them isn't exactly required but some people like to look colourful. Why do you ask?"

"Um..." Kiibo starts to frown. "I don't have fingernails so I can't partake in this activity. However, I must admit that it's always been a desire of mine to be able to join in with human pastimes like this."

"Hold on just a second." Rantaro finishes the nail he's working on before leaning over and scooping up Kiibo's hand. The robot blinks as Rantaro examines his hand, *umming* and *ahhing* before pointing to the end of one of Kiibo's fingers. "Whilst you don't have nails, you do have slightly raised areas where your nails would be if you had them. Although they're not very noticeable...yeah, I can totally work with this."

"Huh?" Kiibo looks caught off guard as Rantaro lets go of his hand. "What do you mean?"

"Just because you don't have actual fingernails doesn't mean I can't use nail polish on you," Rantaro says. He looks up at the ceiling thoughtfully. "Although I do admit I'm not sure how easy

it would be to get the nail polish off you once it's dried so-

"You'll paint my fingers?" Kiibo asks hopefully, his eyes sparkling with yearning.

"Well I need to finish Yumeno's nails off first," Rantaro says. "And then I was going to move onto Akamatsu-

"Oh, no, Kiibo can go first since he looks so excited!" Kaede insists. She gestures to the bottle in the robot's hand. "You want to use the cyan paint, right?"

"I think it matches my eyes," Kiibo answers, sounding incredibly serious.

Kaede isn't sure where Kiibo's sudden desire to hang out has come from but she's certainly not complaining. She actually finds the entire situation more than endearing. Even Himiko looks pleased as Kiibo kneels down next to her, his eyes wide with anticipation.

"It tickles," Himiko warns him as Rantaro moves onto her pinky finger.

Kiibo grins proudly. "I don't have to worry about things like that."

"Lucky," Himiko grumbles, her shoulders trembling as she barely holds back a giggle.

"Steady now," Rantaro murmurs as he finishes off her last finger. He checks both of her hands and does a satisfied little nod. "Yep, looks good enough to me. What do you think, Yumeno?"

"Are you sure you're not a professional?" Himiko checks out her nails in awe before thrusting them towards Kaede. "Look, Kaede! Doesn't it look like an actual makeup artist did my nails? If I didn't know any better then I would've thought he used magic to do them so perfectly!"

When Himiko doesn't correct herself after bringing up magic, Kaede smiles softly. "Yeah, they look really good!"

"I wouldn't say they look that professional," Rantaro responds bashfully, rubbing the back of his head. He does look extremely pleased however. "I just have a lot of practice, that's all. Good thing that I never lost my skills even after leaving the simulation."

"So is it my turn now?" Kiibo asks, holding out his hands uncertainly. "Um, what am I supposed to do?"

Rantaro sighs fondly as Kiibo dangles his hands awkwardly. "Hold them out like this..."

As Rantaro adjusts the robot's hands, Kaede can't help but think to herself that she hopes there are plenty more moments like this in the future. She especially hopes that Rantaro will always be around to paint her nails all the colours of the rainbow and all the shades in between.

—

During Kaede's shift of keeping an eye on the door, something peculiar happens. Someone leaves the office but not through the door. She almost misses the person leaving entirely and only notices their departure when she sees a foot in the window. Kaede blinks, wondering if she's seeing things when the foot disappears.

She looks around the office. Kiibo is currently charging in the corner whilst Shuichi is slumped over his monitor. Only the steady rise and fall of his shoulders suggests that he's currently fast asleep. She knows Rantaro and Himiko are sleeping since they're right next to her so that leaves

only one person.

Kaede is quiet as she creeps over to the open window and she pokes her head out of it. Oh. She feels a little stupid for not realising that the office must be on the top floor. She cranes her head up and spots the ledge of the roof in reaching distance of the window.

That means Maki must be on the roof.

Kaede hesitates before slowly pulling her body out of the window, sitting on the window ledge and grabbing the side of the roof with her hands firmly. As she repeats in her head mentally to not look down, she starts to haul herself out of the window and presses her feet firmly against the window ledge. Then, with wobbly legs, she starts to lift herself onto the roof, grunting as her legs start to flail.

Despite exercising with Tenko and Kaito in the simulation, it seems her strength hasn't been transferred to her actual body. Every one of her muscles feel like jelly and she quickly starts to regret climbing out of the window without planning ahead.

Before she can panic, a pair of hands wrap around her wrists and she's suddenly hauled onto the roof completely. Kaede yelps as she lands on her hands and knees heavily. It takes a couple of seconds to process that she's been helped up onto the roof. When she looks up, she sees Maki staring down at her with an unreadable expression on her face.

"You're far too weak to be pulling stunts like that," Maki says.

Kaede barely holds back a growl. Why is Maki always so rude? "Excuse me?"

"Your body is still recovering," Maki points out and Kaede feels stupid. Oh. "How do you think everyone would've felt if they looked out of the window in the morning and saw your body splattered across the pavement?"

"I get it, I get it, I was stupid to follow you up here," Kaede grumbles as she dusts her trousers off.

"How'd you even know I was up here in the first place?" Maki sighs.

"I saw your foot in the window."

"Ah."

When Maki turns her head away, Kaede quickly senses that the conversation is going to die a rather painful death if she doesn't keep it going herself. "Are you even allowed up here?"

"Hah?" Maki looks her up and down before shrugging. "Probably not."

"Does..." Kaede winces as Maki glares at her. It's more than obvious that Maki just wants to be left alone but Kaede can't help herself. "So does anyone know you come up here or..."

"What is this? An interrogation?"

"I'm just asking!" Kaede crosses her arms. "I was under the impression that we weren't allowed to leave the office! We're both *clearly* out of the office right now!"

Maki holds her glare before sighing. "I haven't told anyone I come up here and no one has asked so I assume the answer is no."

"Aren't you going against Saihara's wishes coming up here though?" Kaede asks. She flinches as

Maki's eyes shine dangerously for a split second. "He's the one who said-"

"Saihara would be a hypocrite if he told me off for coming up here," Maki answers.

Kaede instantly perks up at this new piece of information. "How come?"

"Do you ever stop asking questions?" Maki grumbles. She does, however, surprisingly give Kaede an answer. "We both came up here the second night after waking up." She looks up at the sky and for a second, Kaede sees Maki's face soften. Maki quickly veils her face with a neutral expression. "The sky was clear and Saihara wanted to take a closer look so I helped him up. It's ironic that he's so strict about everyone staying in the office when he was one of the first people to leave it."

Oh. Kaede thought Maki was going to say she knows Shuichi leaves the office or something along those lines. She suddenly feels guilty for assuming so. "I see..."

"He hasn't come back up since," Maki says. "But I like to come up here so I can..."

When Maki clamms up, Kaede tries to ease an answer from her carefully. "So you can?"

"It's none of your business."

Kaede almost lets out a loud sigh. Here she thought they were getting somewhere. "You must come up here for a reason. I mean, it must get boring sitting around in the office every single day, right?"

Maki doesn't entertain her with an answer. She simply crosses her arms and looks at Kaede expectantly. It becomes more than obvious that Maki wants Kaede to leave so she can get back to whatever she was doing. Kaede, however, isn't easily deterred. She starts to walk around the roof with her hands clasped behind her back. When she reaches the opposite side of the roof, she peers over it.

"Hey, why don't we open one of the windows to get access to a different room?" Kaede suggests. "Maybe we can find something that might explain what's going on-"

"Don't be so foolish." Maki rolls her eyes heavily. "For starters, the windows don't open from the outside so we'd have to smash them to get inside and that will cause needless noise. Secondly, you don't need to know what's going on-"

"What do you mean by that? What do you mean *I* don't need to know what's going on?" Kaede asks. "Does that mean you know-"

"Do you want to-" Maki cuts herself off with a hiss and closes her eyes. She takes a deep breath before saying, "stop acting like there's some big mystery that you need to solve. The only thing we all need to do at the moment is wait for everyone else to wake up-"

"You know that's not the case! Something else is going on, right?" Kaede presses. "That's why you're always talking to Saihara and Kiibo behind everyone else's back, right? You three know something the rest of us don't and that's really not fair!"

Maki raises an eyebrow. "Are you that paranoid?"

"Huh?"

"I talk to Saihara in private because I talk to him about things he only understands," Maki says. "And I talk to Kiibo privately because he's the one who assumes I like to talk one on one. He

mostly asks me how Saihara is doing, if you must know. The reason why I don't involve the rest of you is because Saihara's wellbeing is none of your business."

"...really?"

"You don't believe me?" Maki asks impatiently.

"Only because it doesn't make sense that the three of you are close but when it comes to Yumeno, it's like neither you or Saihara care," Kaede says. She knows she has caught Maki off guard as her mouth squeezes into a small circle. "Have you not realised how much she's struggling? She cares about you all so much and you won't even give her the time of day!"

"That's because she doesn't deserve to be dragged into such a mess," Maki retorts quickly before freezing.

"What do you-"

"I didn't mean to say that," Maki says. "It came out wrong-"

"So what did you mean to say?"

Maki lets out a frustrated noise. "It's not my place to say."

"Oh come on!" Kaede barely holds herself back from throwing her hands in the air. "Now I *know* you're hiding something!"

"It's something personal," Maki insists. "And the less people involved, the better. Besides, Yumeno can care about everyone all she wants. It doesn't change the fact that she hardly knows any of us properly at all. I know she wants to help but she can't help with things she doesn't understand."

Kaede feels her jaw lock. It's a struggle to figure out if Maki is being cruelly kind or just doesn't care. She knows that Maki tends to be blunt but Kaede senses that maybe she's entering a territory she truly knows something about. "You shouldn't ignore her so often though. You shouldn't turn your back on a friend."

"I..." Maki bites down on the inside of her mouth before shaking her head. "She's got you and Amami now, right? So that means she's not alone anymore."

"That's not the point-"

"With how things are, I'm no use to her at the moment," Maki says. "I know Kiibo has been trying but I also know his social skills are next to non-existent. He tries, though. At least now she has people who get how emotions work by her side."

"You're human, you should know how emotions-"

The look on Maki's face causes Kaede's mouth to abruptly shut. Surprisingly, she's not on the receiving end of one of Maki's classic glares. No, the look on Maki's face is something...*vulnerable*. Maki forces it away as quickly as it appeared but the image is already burned into Kaede's mind.

"Harukawa..."

Does Maki think she doesn't have the capability to talk to Himiko about how they're both feeling?

That's...actually really sad. Maybe I've misunderstood Maki all this time.

“Don’t look at me like that. You look like a dumbass,” Maki says and turns her head away. “Isn’t it about time you went back inside?”

Kaede shakes her head. “But I think we’re getting somewhere. I think I’m finally starting to understand you-”

The pianist recoils as Maki’s face darkens. “Don’t you *dare* say that.”

“H-Huh?”

“How can you say you understand me when you don’t even know half the things I’ve...” Maki grits her teeth. “Go back inside.”

“But Harukawa-”

“Please.”

The sudden desperation in Maki’s eyes is something Kaede doesn’t expect. She swallows, hesitates for a split second before heading back to the open window. Kaede climbs back inside carefully, feeling Maki’s eyes watch her the entire time. Once she’s back inside the office, she shivers and wraps her arms around herself.

For some reason, she feels like she left the roof with more questions than answers.

—

The following week is rather uneventful. Monokuma doesn’t announce a new motive and nothing out of the ordinary happens in the simulation. Kaede ends up noticing that Kaito, Ryoma and Tenko have taken to camping out in Kokichi’s room to do their training, which Kaede finds sweet.

It takes almost a week for something to happen during the night. Kaede is looking up at the ceiling, counting all of the tiles when she hears someone walking around the room. She knows it isn’t Maki since the window doesn’t slide open. She waits a couple of seconds and her eyes go wide as she hears a creak and the sound of a door opening.

This is it! All I need to do now is sit up and see who-

Kaede doesn’t expect to hear a second set of footsteps. She freezes into place as she hears someone else head towards the door. This person, however, does not leave and stands by the door.

Almost as if they are seeing someone off. Kaede’s chest feels heavy with worry as she swallows. Someone here not only has known for presumably quite some time that someone has been leaving but also isn’t doing anything to stop them. Just what the hell is going on?

Before Kaede can sit up to see who the culprits are, the door closes and the office is once again cast into darkness. Only the pale moonlight that occasionally trickles in through the windows makes it so that the room isn’t pitch black. Kaede drums her fingers against her stomach, wondering whether or not to sit up now and confront the person who stayed behind or to wait just a little longer.

The two people she can cross from her list of suspects with complete certainty are Himiko and Rantaro. Both of them are sleeping on either side of her at the moment. Himiko’s face is pressed against her stomach whilst Rantaro sleeps silently on his side. That leaves Shuichi, Kiibo and Maki

and it disappoints Kaede that she isn't even surprised.

Maybe all three of them know something and that's what they've all been so cagey about. Just what are they up to? Why do they get to follow a different set of rules to the rest of us? Why am I even following Shuichi's rules when it's becoming increasingly obvious that he doesn't follow them himself?

Kaede continues to count the tiles silently. The moment whoever left comes back, she's going to sit up and confront them along with the second guilty party. She never thought in her lifetime she'd become angry over someone leaving a room before. Whilst she's aware that none of this is any of her business, she can't help but feel angry.

Why is she being kept in the dark? Not only her but Himiko and Rantaro too? She doesn't understand and it frustrates her. If there's an issue then shouldn't everyone be dealing with it together?

She waits for maybe an hour. When the door creaks open once more, she fists her hands into her sheets and takes a quiet deep breath. Okay, she's going to do it. She's going to sit up and find out who has been sneaking out.

"Are you okay?"

"...I *hate* them."

Despite the fact that they're both whispering, Kaede easily identifies the voices of Kiibo and Shuichi. It's Shuichi's tone of voice that stops her from flying from her makeshift bed. He sounds distressed.

"What happened this time?"

"They just won't listen, Kiibo." Shuichi lets out a shuddery breath. "No matter what I suggest, they keep shooting me down. One of them even *laughed* at me this time."

There's a slight pause. "Do you want to keep trying?"

"Of course I do!" Shuichi's voice goes high. Kaede imagines the two of them looking around to make sure that no one has woken up. Shuichi goes back to whispering. "If I back out now then everything would've been for nothing and...I can't allow that to happen. I just can't."

"I understand that, Saihara. I was more so suggesting if you want me to take over."

"No, that won't work. I'm sorry, Kiibo. You were made by them so they'll know how to manipulate you. It's important that you stay here and keep guard of the door."

"You said last time they were getting impatient. Is this still the case?"

Shuichi sighs. "They're getting tired of waiting around but I think as long as I keep making our conversations go around in circles, it'll take them a while to actually do anything."

"...Saihara, be honest. Do you actually think you're getting anywhere?"

"Huh?"

"You've been talking with them for quite a while now, yes? Surely they must know that you only have one offer for them."

“Unfortunately for us, my offer is quite literally the *only* offer they won’t accept. I’ll keep pressing for it though.”

“But do you think you’ll succeed?”

“I have to succeed. I have to make sure that there’s a reason why everyone has been through so much suffering. Otherwise...”

“What will you do if Ouma manages to break down the wall?”

“...I’ll figure something out if that happens.”

“But maybe it’ll be a good thing if he does break the wall down. Saihara, isn’t it about time we told everyone what’s happening? Maybe someone else might have a better idea on how to help us?”

“No one else can know. No one else *deserves* to know.”

“Everyone is going to find out eventually.”

“But if I can fix everything before people find out what’s happening then they won’t have to-”

“Just...try not to drag this out for too long, okay? Promise me that you’ll tell everyone the truth once they’re out of the simulation.”

“But we’ve already decided to tell everyone when they leave that the games are being broadcasted. We can’t just tell everyone we lied and then ask them to trust us.”

“...Saihara, just what have we done?”

Shuichi doesn’t respond.

Kaede remains wide awake for the rest of the night as her heart pounds frantically against her chest.

—

“Saihara has been leaving the office?” Himiko echoes. “And Kiibo knows but hasn’t told anyone?”

Kaede nods, a deep frown present on her face. “Yeah, I’m sure of it.”

“Did you confront them last night?” Rantaro asks. He suddenly looks worried. “Nothing bad happened, right?”

“I didn’t say anything,” Kaede reveals. “When they started talking I decided to listen in just in case they said something important and...well, I guess I ended up hearing a lot more than I bargained for.”

Himiko fumbles with sleeves. “And you heard them say that...none of the games are actually been broadcasted?”

Kaede nods as Rantaro murmurs a quiet, “*I knew it.*”

“I just don’t get why they lied!” Kaede kicks the floor so the chair she’s on spins haphazardly. “And I don’t know whether Harukawa is in on everything either. Surely she must be, right? She told me that she talks to Saihara about things only *they* understand. She must’ve been referring to

all of this!”

“Should we confront them?” Himiko asks. She looks incredibly pale. “I-I really don’t understand. I don’t know why Saihara and Kiibo are being so sketchy! I truly thought at the very least that Saihara was a dependable person! H-He’s the entire reason why we all got through the last class trial!”

“You said that he apparently ended Danganronpa during your game, right?” Rantaro asks. Himiko nods anxiously. “So why on earth would he lie to us all saying that the very game he was determined to end is still being enjoyed by a fabricated audience?”

“It just doesn’t make any sense!” Himiko presses her lips together until they disappear. “And I want to know why Kiibo is helping him!”

“There has to be a specific reason as to why they’re lying,” Kaede murmurs. She rubs her chin as her chair comes to a halt. “However, Saihara also made it pretty clear he doesn’t want anyone to know what he’s been up to. I’m pretty sure he said none of us deserve to know what’s going on.”

“*Saihara* said that?!” Himiko blanches. “T-That *can’t* be right!”

Rantaro grimaces and puts a hand on Himiko’s shoulder as her eyes go shiny with tears. “Akamatsu, are you completely sure you heard him correctly?”

Kaede nods with a wince. “Surely there has to be some sort of context as to why he said that though. He didn’t sound malicious but...”

“How do you think he’ll react if we just confront him?” Rantaro asks, sounding like he’s tempted to burst into the main office and question Shuichi at this very second. “You said he sounded upset last night, right?”

“He sounded...so exhausted,” Kaede says. “It makes me wonder how many other times he’s been out before.”

“How could I have not noticed?” Himiko mutters.

“Every time I’ve heard him he’s been very quiet,” Kaede reassures her. “And I’ve got particularly sensitive ears too.”

Rantaro pulls a face as he flops his head back, looking up at the ceiling with an irritated look in his eyes. “I wonder who Saihara has been talking to then. My first guess is Team Danganronpa.”

“That seems most likely,” Kaede agrees.

“Team Danganronpa...” Himiko starts to chew her lip. “Has Saihara been dealing with them all on his own this entire time?”

“Huh?” Kaede finds herself surprised at how sympathetic Himiko sounds. “What do you mean?”

“If it is Team Danganronpa Saihara is talking to...” Himiko’s voice starts to trail off. “Then he’s talking to the same people who put us in the simulation. He’s talking to people who put people into killing games for fun. I doubt any of them are particularly nice.”

“*I hate them.*”

“Ah...” Kaede unconsciously starts to chew on the tip of her thumb. “Now that you mention it, the

first thing he said was *'I hate them.'* Perhaps he was referring to Team Danganronpa.”

Rantaro sighs. “Maybe we should just tell him what we know so he doesn’t have to talk to them alone anymore.”

“But he’s not alone. He has Kiibo,” Kaede points out. “And I think it’s more than likely he has Harukawa on his side too.”

“So all this time all three of them have been keeping me in the dark,” Himiko murmurs. She starts to pout. “I thought we were a team.”

There has to be a reason why they never told Himiko. Something isn’t right about all of this and I can’t figure out what.

“Amami, do you have any ideas on what’s actually going on?” Kaede asks, looking at him expectantly.

“Honestly?” Rantaro laughs humourlessly. “I think I’m as lost as you guys are. I wish we could just ask but I doubt any of them will say anything. They already plan to lie to everyone about the glitched games being shown to the public. Hell, it wouldn’t even surprise me if they’re lying about the game being glitched too.”

“Nyeh?! You don’t think they’re lying about that as well, right?!” Himiko’s cheeks flush a dark red.

“W-Well we know there has to be *some* sort of glitch,” Kaede points out, hoping that doing so will calm Himiko down. “Because Amami figured that out whilst inside of our game and there’s more than enough evidence to suggest that there’s at least a glitch of some sort.”

“Don’t worry, Yumeno. I was only joking,” Rantaro reassures her. “Besides, it would be impossible for them to lie about the glitch. None of them would’ve been around when the game was being programmed anyway.”

Kaede starts to groan. “If only Monokuma kept Iruma alive. I bet she’d know what to do...”

“If we’re lucky, she’ll be out soon,” Himiko says.

“Hopefully someone will find a way to break the wall down without setting Ouma’s bangle off,” Kaede murmurs. She delicately rubs her own wrist, as if she was wearing a bangle of her own. “I can’t believe Monokuma gave him such a ridiculous instruction.”

“I can’t believe Momota lied about his,” Rantaro says. “Whilst the monitors are grainy, I still know his instruction didn’t match what he said. Still though, what he told everyone his instruction...was...um...”

Rantaro looks at the monitors with a slightly panicked look on his face. Kaede raises an eyebrow. “What’s wrong?”

“Do any of you know how to turn a specific monitor off?”

“Eh?” Kaede wonders why Rantaro is asking such a question in the first place when she spots what he must’ve seen. Rantaro awkwardly averts his gaze from a particular monitor whilst Kaede’s face turns red.

She sees Kaito and Kokichi on Kaito’s bed, which sounds innocent enough. However, with the

positioning of their bodies...

We're not about to watch them have some sort of steamy makeout session are we?!

Kaede yelps as she covers her face with her hands whilst Himiko tugs on the strings of her hoodie so that her entire head is engulfed by the hood.

She's not sure if it's miraculous timing or not when Maki suddenly walks into the monitor room, running one hand through her hair whilst her other hand is wrapped around a water bottle.

"Has anyone seen my scrunchie?" Maki asks. She shoots everyone a flat look when she notices everyone's red faces. "Hah? What's going on?"

"D-Do you know how to turn a specific monitor off?" Kaede asks desperately. She's more than grateful that she decided from the start to not turn the sound on.

Maki stares at her with an unimpressed look on her face as she examines the monitors herself. "Why on earth do you want-"

The water bottle in Maki's hand crunches loudly as she squeezes it so tightly the remaining water inside of it splashes onto the floor. Kaede almost freezes as she spots the intense look on Maki's face. If looks could kill then...actually Kaede isn't sure who Maki would kill. She's glaring at the monitor that both Kaito and Kokichi are on. The pianist feels a cold sweat break across her skin as she notices one of Maki's hands start to twitch.

"Um, Harukawa?" Rantaro prompts. "Can you turn the monitor off? I think the two of them need some privacy."

Maki snaps out of whatever stupor she was in and reaches under the monitor and presses something that causes it to turn off. Kaede thought she'd be relieved to see the monitor off but Maki's rigid body leaves her feeling tense.

"Thanks-" Rantaro is cut off as Maki storms out of the room, slamming the door so loudly that it rattles.

"Well that was..." Kaede puts her hands to her cheeks. They still feel flushed. "Something."

"What were they *doing*?!" Himiko squeaks.

"...something," Rantaro decides to say.

Something Maki clearly isn't happy with. Whilst Kaede isn't exactly sure what either Kokichi or Kaito were doing, the position they were in was certainly...interesting. Intimate.

"Oh dear," Himiko murmurs and burrows herself even further into her jacket.

—

Tsumugi leaves Korekiyo's notebook upstairs and things spiral from there.

In a matter of minutes, Tenko and Kirumi end up dead, Korekiyo is punished and Kokichi loses his mind.

The wall remains standing.

Rantaro has an arm wrapped around Himiko, who is silently crying as she watches the monitors.

Whilst there's a lump in Kaede's throat, she somehow manages to fight off her own tears.

"He killed her *again*," Himiko whimpers and Kaede squeezes one of her hands. "He killed her again with the same sickle."

It was a quick death but that doesn't bring Kaede any comfort. She was the one who was in the monitor room at the time when it happened. Korekiyo had spotted both Kirumi and Tenko as he was leaving his lab and everything went wrong after that. Kaede wonders if all three of them would be alive right now if Tsumugi hadn't left Korekiyo's notebook upstairs.

Everyone is currently crowded in the monitor room, even Shuichi. Sometimes Kaede sneaks a look at his face and is repeatedly frustrated when she spots him wearing the same neutral expression. He must have an incredibly good poker face since everyone else in the room looks worried. Even Maki is wearing a frown and Kiibo looks like he wants to say something but isn't sure what.

Kaede watches as Miu chases Kokichi into the boiler room outside. He's hiding behind the boiler itself, hands gripping his hair tightly as Miu storms around the room. She growls when she doesn't find him and storms out. Kokichi leaves a couple of moments later with a pipe in his hand and eyes swirling with despair.

"We can't just keep watching," Rantaro murmurs and looks over his shoulders to stare at the pods. "This is simply too much."

"There's not much we can do though," Shuichi points out after an appropriate amount of time passes. He looks at Rantaro calmly. "We already know that they have something that can take down the wall-"

"This isn't about breaking down the wall anymore, Saihara," Rantaro says through gritted teeth. He jabs a finger towards the many screens. "This is about making sure no one else dies-"

"With how Ouma is at the moment, it would be a bad idea for anyone to re-join," Shuichi counters. "His behaviour is currently unpredictable."

Kaede watches as Kokichi storms down the hidden hallway in the girl's bathroom, dragging the heavy pipe along with him.

"He needs *help*," Rantaro responds. "Everyone does. You do realise Shirogane has locked herself and Momota in the hangar, right? He's too sick to take care of himself and since Hoshi is too preoccupied with looking for Ouma and Iruma, there's no one left to look after him."

Shuichi winces but shakes his head. "It's just too much of a risk-"

"What if I went in?" Maki suddenly says. She purses her lips as she stares at the monitor Kaito is on with the intensity of a hawk. "I can sort Shirogane out easily."

"Harukawa," Shuichi murmurs warningly.

"Whilst it is unfortunate, the most we can all do is simply wait and hope Hoshi manages to calm both Iruma and Ouma down," Kiibo says and his tone leaves no room for any arguing. "And I'm fairly confident that the wall only needs one more hit before it's successfully taken down. Since the gun is still functional, we have no reason to intervene."

"It still needs to charge though," Rantaro says. "And we don't know how long it'll take before it's working again. I'd hardly call it functional at the moment."

“By functional, I mean it’s still intact,” Kiibo says. “I know it’s hard watching everyone struggle but they still have the resources to leave.”

“Are you saying you’ll only let us re-join if the gun breaks?” Rantaro asks incredulously.

“With how unpredictable everything is at the moment, having even just a single person re-join at the moment is an extremely bad idea,” Shuichi says. He looks at the monitors with an unreadable look on his face. “Believe me, I hate watching all of this unfold too but the safest place for us all to be right now is outside of the simulation.”

Himiko snuffles and wipes her eyes with her sleeves. “B-But look at Ouma! And Iruma! She looks like she really wants to kill him!”

Kaede spots Miu storming around the school. She only feels slightly relieved as she spots Ryoma getting closer to her. Neither of them know they’re about to run into each other.

“Everyone, please take a deep breath and try to keep calm,” Kiibo says. “I know the situation isn’t good but please try to remember that re-joining the simulation will only be fuelling the loops if something ends up going wrong.”

Rantaro’s jaw twitches and Kaede swears he’s about to argue. However, he merely shakes his head with a click of his tongue and stands up. “Fine, I’ll hold off from re-joining for now. I’m not just going to sit around and watch everyone suffer though.” He puts a hand on one of Himiko’s shoulders and looks at Kaede with a desperate look. “I think we should wait somewhere else.”

Himiko doesn’t put up too much of a fight and stands up with him. Kaede spares the monitors one last longing glance before following the two of them out of the room, knowing that if she stays any longer then the urge to re-join and help will become too much to ignore.

—

Kokichi breaks down the wall.

Kaede only feels victorious for a couple of moments before her glee turns into icy dread. It takes a while for all of the dust to clear but once it does, her eyes straight away land on the glass lodged in his stomach and the pool of blood he’s lying in.

Kaito tries to help him and this time Kaede fails to hold back her tears as she watches them both struggle together. They don’t even manage to move forward more than a step. As Kokichi slumps down the side of the Exisal, Kaede desperately tries to swallow down the persistent lump in her throat and is unsuccessful each time.

“This is too much,” Kaede murmurs. Everyone is back in the monitor room once more. Kiibo had announced that Ryoma had sorted both Kokichi and Miu out and since Rantaro had calmed down significantly by then, the trio had returned.

She licks her lips, realising that they’ve become dry before clenching her fists. No, she can’t do this. She can’t just stand around and watch Kokichi bleed out only a couple of feet away from the exit.

Kaede is mentally preparing herself to jump into her pod and help when she’s suddenly knocked into the wall. She gasps as she almost trips, catching herself at the last second. She watches incredulously as Maki storms past her and towards the pods, Shuichi hot on her trail the entire time.

“Harukawa, just hold on a second.” Shuichi grabs Maki’s sleeve. “You can’t just-”

“That idiot isn’t thinking straight. He can’t just choose to die with someone like *him*.” Maki opens up her pod and tries to step inside. Shuichi tugs on her sleeve once more, this time a little more desperately.

“We still don’t know if the wall is a viable option-”

Maki glares at him and Kaede is more than surprised when Shuichi doesn’t wither. “Yes we do. We’ve known from the very start that the wall was always an option.”

Kaede hears Rantaro suck in a sharp breath next to her and feels Himiko squeeze her arm tightly.

“I thought you said-” Rantaro is easily talked over by Kiibo, who tries to step in between Maki and Shuichi.

“Please, you both need to calm down!”

“I *need* to save Momota,” Maki retorts heatedly. Her lips go thin as she moves her glare onto Kiibo. “There’s absolutely no reason for us not to be able to go back inside now. Monokuma is no longer around and Shirogane isn’t a threat anymore.”

Shuichi shakes his head. “But-”

“You’re *not* making me watch Momota die *again*.” Maki’s voice turns icy cold. Her fists are trembling by her sides. “You’ve already stopped me from saving him once. I won’t allow you to stop me a second time.”

Kaede bites her lip. Maki must’ve wanted to re-join the simulation during Kaede’s final class trial. With how soft Maki’s eyes go any time Kaito is brought up, she must’ve been devastated when Kaito decided to give his life up so Kaede and Rantaro could leave. Kaede suddenly feels the urge to apologise.

“Harukawa, we’re still not completely sure if the wall really was just a one off,” Shuichi insists. “How about you wait for someone else to go through it first before-”

“Do you even care about Momota?” Maki snaps. “You’re supposed to be his sidekick, Saihara.”

“*Of course* I care about him!” Shuichi argues. He puts his hand on Maki’s pod in an attempt to close it. “But I also care about you too-”

“Bullshit. If you truly care then you’ll let me save him!” Maki’s voice starts to shake. “He’s right *there*, Saihara. He’s about to die for someone who won’t even remember him in a couple of minutes!”

“That’s his choice-”

Kaede gasps as Maki slaps Shuichi. *Hard*. The detective stumbles, raising a tentative hand to his cheek as he looks at Maki in shock. Even she seems surprised for a split second before she veils her bewilderment with a scowl. Shuichi hesitantly moves his jaw and a trickle of blood slips down the corner of his mouth. Kaede doesn’t know why she’s so shocked when she notices that the blood is red.

“H-Harukawa!” Kiibo raises his hands in alarm. “Please, there’s no need to resort to violence!”

“I...” Maki sighs through her nose.

“Saihara, are you okay?” Kaede asks carefully.

“I’m fine,” Shuichi murmurs, raising his head so he can look Maki in the eye. “Harukawa, you know what state Momota is in. If you go in there and start dragging him around then you might make things worse.”

“And if I don’t go in at all then he’s going to die for certain,” Maki counters. “But if I go in and handle him carefully then maybe I can-”

“And what about Ouma?” Rantaro asks as he heads towards the pods. “He’s still alive too.”

“Barely,” Maki says. She frowns when Rantaro narrows his eyes. “Amami, I’m being realistic here. He’s already in the process of bleeding out. The glass caught him in vital areas. If someone starts jostling him around then he’s just going to die quicker. There’s no saving him.” She looks at Shuichi. “But there still is a chance to save Momota.”

She has one foot inside of her pod when Shuichi suddenly blurts out, “we were all ready to die so we could end Danganronpa.”

Maki freezes and whips her head around quickly. “Hah?”

“At the end of our trial, we all decided to use our lives to end Danganronpa, remember?” Shuichi says. He puts a hand to his chest. “Harukawa, we’re still in the process of ending Danganronpa. You know what we need to do so we can buy ourselves more time-”

“You’re right, *we* were prepared to use our lives to end Danganronpa,” Maki says. “You, Yumeno, Kiibo and I. But that’s *it*. Only us four decided to die just for the chance to end these stupid killing games. No one else.”

Shuichi swallows. “But-”

“I’ve had enough of watching Momota suffer,” Maki says quietly. She averts her gaze to the floor. She doesn’t see Himiko head back into the monitor room. “The wall is down and Momota is right at the exit, Saihara. It’s about time we change tactics.”

Shuichi opens his mouth to say something but doesn’t get the chance to say anything. Himiko leaves the monitor room, her skin pale and clammy with sweat. Her voice is barely a whisper as she says, “I think they’re both dead.”

“*What?*” Maki’s eyes go wide and she rushes into the monitor room, almost causing Kaede to fall into the wall once again. This time the pianist doesn’t stumble and she follows Maki to the monitor she last saw Kaito and Kokichi on.

If she didn’t know any better then Kaede would’ve assumed that they’re both fast asleep. However, the moment her eyes land on them both she just knows that they’ve passed. She almost falls to her knees but uses the desk as a clutch. From the corner of her eye, she spots Ryoma and Miu march Tsumugi out of the hangar and suddenly everything feels ten times worse.

It takes a couple of attempts to get Tsumugi out and it doesn’t click until Tsumugi is pushed through the wall by Miu that she’s going to wake up any second. Kaede hears a pod unlock and for a moment, she thinks nothing is going to happen.

What Kaede doesn’t expect is for a dark haired girl to launch herself out of her pod, eyes wide with

panic. She looks around the room and almost falls into another pod as she claws her way over to the monitor Shuichi is always sitting at.

“H-Hey!” Kaede’s voice causes the girl to jump and she whips her head around and stares at her in disbelief. The girl blinks before cackling maniacally. Before anyone can even comprehend her sudden awakening, the girl is smashing her hands down onto the keyboard.

Kaede looks at the monitor and sees a lot of complicated coding. The girl’s wild keyboard smashing causes random lines to appear and after a second, a bright red exclamation mark appears on the screen. The girl backs away from the monitor before heading back to her own pod.

“Hold on just a second!” Shuichi cries as the girl climbs back inside. “What did you do?!”

The girl closes her pod and after a couple of seconds, goes still. Across from the girl, Maki mirrors her actions as she also closes her own pod. Kaede had completely missed Maki getting into her own.

“Nyeh?!” Himiko blinks as she dashes towards the monitor, which is starting to beep loudly. “W-What happened?! She just...”

“We need to go after her,” Rantaro says and climbs into his own pod, ignoring Shuichi’s cries of protest.

“She was so fast!” Kaede pushes all of her fear as far down as possible as she also climbs into her own pod.

“What are you both doing?” Shuichi asks, sounding breathless as his eyes dart from the monitor to the pods.

“Going after whoever that was, of course,” Rantaro answers. “I’m more than confident that was Shirogane just now and I’m not about to let her put everyone through hell again.”

He closes his pod with a slam and Kaede mimics him, taking a deep breath as she waits to be loaded in. She squeezes her eyes shut and waits. After a couple of seconds, she cracks open an eye and is startled to see that she’s still inside the pod.

“Huh?” She eyes the pod door and realises that it isn’t closed properly. However, it isn’t a case of someone causing it to not close but rather the door itself is refusing to click shut. She pushes it open at the same time as Rantaro, who also looks rather confused.

“What’s going on?” Rantaro murmurs. He tries to close the door again but is met with the same results. It seems the pod doors are refusing to click into the place, meaning they won’t activate.

Himiko points at the flashing red monitor. “I think Shirogane must’ve done something to cause the game to glitch even worse.”

As she says this, a body suddenly topples on top of Kaede. The pianist yelps as she suddenly finds her arms full and she staggers as she tries to keep herself and the mystery person standing.

“Fucking hell...my head...” The person groans and it doesn’t take a genius to figure out who fell into Kaede’s arms.

—

Miu spends a lot of time fiddling with her hair, which is as equally as dyed as Kaede’s. Her roots

are much more prominent and the shade of blond she went for is different. Next to Miu is Ryoma. He looks almost naked without his hat. His hair is a light brown that's a little longer than the hairstyle he had in the simulation.

Whilst both Miu and Ryoma were waking up, Shuichi ended up going into the bathroom and despite the fact a couple of hours have passed, he's still in there. Kiibo seems to be at a loss, especially since Miu keeps staring at him with wide eyes. Kaede decides to take charge and fills Ryoma and Miu in on what she thinks is appropriate.

She doesn't expect the almost nonchalant responses from them both. Miu's response surprised her the most. The inventor had taken one look at her file, clicked her tongue and said, "well at least I'm not a fucking loser anymore."

Ryoma had blinked, pushed his file to the side and asked Kaede, "when can we go back in?"

After some examining, Kaede ended up concluding that the pods are currently not functional. Only Tsumugi and Maki got into the game before they were rendered useless. The brunette must've decided to make a split second decision and re-joined the simulation before she had time to think things through properly.

The topic of re-joining the simulation is still up in the air. Kaede has so many questions after the argument between Shuichi and Maki but since the detective has locked himself away, Kaede can't exactly ask him what Maki was on about.

Kiibo has also decided to remain silent. Even when Rantaro had pressed him for some sort of explanation, Kiibo had clammed up and repeated that he can't answer anything right now.

"So you're saying we can't leave?" Miu asks, the tips of her fingers turning pale as her hair all but strangles them. "What the fuck?"

"Do none of you know what's going on?" Ryoma looks defeated and Kaede can't blame him. After all, he has just lost three of his closest friends in the span of a couple of hours. She wishes she could offer him more.

"All that we know is that we should stay in the office because we're the safest here," Himiko says.

"Are you sure about that?" Ryoma asks, raising an eyebrow. He gestures towards the bathroom. "Is he okay in there?"

"Ah..." Kaede awkwardly clutches her arm in an attempt to comfort herself. "I'm not entirely sure."

Ryoma shakes his head with a grumble and reaches up to presumably tug on his hat. When he's met with air, he clicks his tongue. "Listen, it's been a long day and all I want are some answers."

"I don't think any of us actually know the *right* answers though," Rantaro tells him delicately.

"Surely Kiibo must know what's going on?" Miu looks at the robot expectantly.

Kiibo grimaces and looks away. "I...I really can't say anything."

"Why not?" Ryoma snaps and Kaede jumps at his abrupt anger. "My friends *died* and for what? So we can have access to three tiny rooms?" He starts to scowl. "I thought things were supposed to be better outside of the game. Just what the hell is going on?"

“Um...” Kiibo pulls a face and automatically turns his attention towards the closed bathroom door despite knowing that Shuichi isn’t going to help him come up with a response any time soon. “I...I don’t think you’re in the right mind-frame at the moment to-”

“You know what? Forget it,” Ryoma huffs and pulls himself up, his legs trembling like a new-born foal. “I’m going to go for a lie down.”

“Do you need some help?” Himiko asks as she springs to her feet almost instantly.

Ryoma looks at her warily before sighing. “Probably.”

As Himiko guides Ryoma over to the blankets, Kaede turns her attention back to Miu, who is looking at Kiibo with a lost look in her eyes. The inventor bites down on her lip before twisting to face Kaede.

“That’s not the Kiibo I remember,” Miu whispers loudly, thinking that if she hides her mouth with her hand then she won’t be as loud. She’s still pretty loud but Kaede doubts Kiibo actually heard her since he looks pretty distracted. “No one has fucking messed with him, right?”

“He just...remembers a lot more than you expect,” Kaede tells her and Miu blinks owlishly.

“So does he...you know, remember spending time with me in the simulation?”

“I...don’t know,” Kaede answers, wincing as Miu’s face falls. “M-Maybe there’s a way for him to restore his memories? I know he managed to get them transferred once before.”

“Really?” Miu’s eyes light up.

I think it was Maki of all people who told us a couple hours back that Miu had a huge crush on Kiibo or something like that. I mean, it’s kind of obvious she does because of the look on her face. I just wish Kiibo would approach her and at least try to talk to her a little more. He wouldn’t even have to say much in the first place since Miu talks a lot anyway.

“Y-Yeah...” Kaede hopes that she hasn’t just given Miu any false hope.

“I’ll have to ask him about all of that later on then,” Miu says and Kaede is almost jealous at how Miu can make such quick decisions. The inventor does a small nod to herself before clicking her tongue loudly. Miu obviously isn’t impressed with the dressing gown that she’s got on and she plucks the bottom of it with two fingers. “Hey, Bakamatsu? Is there anything better around here to wear? I mean, I can make anything look good but you know.” She gives Kaede’s clothes a pointed look. “I’ll literally wear anything other than what you’ve got on.”

Kaede finds herself smiling instead of feeling annoyed. Miu’s brash attitude is a welcome change of pace. “I think there’s a change of clothes in one of the cabinets. I’ll have a look for you.”

Rantaro ends up helping her and the two crouch in front of the cabinets that are attached to the bottom of the bookcases. “Well they both took the news well about being fictional.”

“Honestly, I think they’re too distracted to have more of a dramatic reaction,” Kaede admits. She finds a shirt and examines it carefully. It looks like it’ll probably be too small for the inventor. She lowers her voice. “I’m not that surprised that Hoshi doesn’t really care. I think he’s too upset to care all that much.”

Rantaro grimaces. “I have no idea what must be running through his head right now. He lost all of his friends just like that.” He shakes his head with a humourless laugh. “Ouma and Momota were

right at the exit too. They were so, *so* close.”

Kaede can't think about either Kokichi and Kaito without feeling the urge to burst into tears. Rantaro's right. They were right in front of the exit and if things were different, they'd also be here right now.

“Not just those two either, Shinguji, Tojo, Chabashira...” Rantaro sighs. “...do you ever get the feeling we should've just went against Saihara's wishes and just re-joined when more people were alive?”

“I don't just get the feeling, I've *felt* it from the moment I woke up,” Kaede admits. She finds a top she thinks will just about fit Miu and drapes it over her forearms. “And I know it's stupid but I also can't help but feeling guilty because ever since Ouma figured out that he needed to take the wall down, I hoped that he would as soon as possible. I just didn't think that...”

When Kaede envisioned the wall being broken, she always imagined a small hole being made that would be big enough for people to fit through. She never imagined pieces of jagged glass hurtling towards Kokichi and embedding into his stomach.

“He knew the risks when it came to taking down the wall,” Rantaro reminds her. “He was even fine with his bangle going off too if it meant the wall came down as soon as possible.”

“I know. I'm just...” Kaede groans and almost drops the shirt she found onto the floor in frustration. “I'm just so ready for all of this to be over. Seriously, I just want to get everyone out of the simulation and then out of the office. I'm starting to think it's not even safe for us to be here anymore.”

“I do think it's about time Saihara explained himself,” Rantaro says. “It's painfully obvious he knows what's going on and quite frankly, I don't care if he doesn't want us to know everything. We deserve to know why we're being kept here.”

Kaede senses that Ryoma might feel just the slightest bit better if he knows that his friend's deaths weren't entirely in vain either.

—

It's late when Shuichi eventually emerges from the bathroom with a bruised face and a bruised ego. Ryoma and Miu are flat out, which was inevitable of course. Himiko's head is resting on one of Kaede's thighs and Kaede is playing with her hair when she spots Shuichi.

He looks extremely sheepish when he realises Kaede has spotted him and for a moment, she's convinced he's going to dive right back into the bathroom. She calls out to him in hope that she can stop him from doing this.

“Saihara, can we talk?” She drops Himiko's hair carefully so she doesn't wake the sleeping mage up. “Please?”

Since Kiibo turned himself onto standby mode hours ago to avoid having any awkward conversations, Rantaro is the only other person who is awake alongside herself and Shuichi. The green haired male's head perks up when he realises that Shuichi is now in the office.

“I...” Shuichi fumbles with his sleeves nervously and turns his head to the side. “Can we talk later?”

“I don't think that's possible,” Kaede says. She looks to Rantaro for confirmation and he nods his

head. He also thinks that now is the right time to talk. "Saihara, surely you must realise that we know that you know a lot more than you're letting on, right? We're sick of being kept in the dark."

"Oh." Shuichi swallows and he looks like he wants the ground to swallow him whole. "I just don't think now is the right time to-"

"If now isn't the right time to talk then when is?" Rantaro presses before Shuichi can walk away. He crosses his arms with a stern look on his face. "Look, I know today has been rather hectic but enough is enough. You need to start telling us what's going on."

"Now really isn't a good time-"

"Saihara, please don't make this harder than it has to be," Kaede finds herself pleading. "We already know that you've been leaving the office." When Shuichi turns drastically pale, Kaede knows she's starting to corner him. "And I heard you talking to Kiibo the other night."

"You did?" Shuichi grimaces. He pauses to think and sighs. "Akamatsu, I assure you that everything you heard isn't what it sounded like. With how you're looking at me, you think I'm hiding some horrible secret, right?"

"I know you're hiding *something*," Kaede decides to say. "And I'd really, *really* appreciate it if you could be honest with me. I don't want to have to doubt you, Saihara. I don't think you've been doing anything malicious but...see things from my perspective. You tell us that we can't leave but I end up finding out that you've been leaving during the night. You tell us that the killing games are being broadcasted yet I heard you tell Kiibo they're not. Saihara, I know you've been lying and I just want to know why."

Shuichi closes his eyes and lets out a tired sigh. "It's...complicated."

"You have plenty of time to explain," Rantaro points out.

Shuichi shies away from this fact. "Even so-"

"Saihara, *please*," Kaede doesn't want to resort to begging but she feels helpless. She doesn't want to distrust Shuichi, she doesn't. She just hopes that he can be reasonable. "Whatever you're hiding is slowly starting to destroy you. You're always on edge. You constantly look tired..." She pulls a face. "Just what are you trying to accomplish?"

"I..." Shuichi looks away once more and remains silent. Even as a minute passes, he doesn't say anything.

Kaede grits her teeth. "Can you at least look me in the eye?! Saihara, you can't even look at me!"

Shuichi flinches as if he's been slapped a second time. He meets her glare warily and Kaede feels like a monster for yelling at him. "I'm sorry."

"No, I'm sorry," Kaede quickly says. "I shouldn't have yelled at you."

"...can we talk later?" Shuichi asks and despite knowing he simply wants to run away from the conversation, Kaede lets him because she knows she'll feel guilty otherwise.

As Shuichi settles down at his usual place by the monitor, Rantaro leans in closer.

"He really doesn't want to say anything."

“I know,” Kaede sighs. She runs a hand through her hair. “We should...probably just give him some space tonight. I doubt he wants to talk to me any time soon.”

“I’m sure that’s not the case,” Rantaro reassures her. He squeezes her free hand. “How about we let things settle before trying to talk to him again?” He looks at Shuichi with an unreadable look on his face. “We’ll keep trying until he tells us everything. He’ll crack eventually. He has to.”

—

Ryoma is on some sort of personal mission to get answers from Shuichi. The moment the tennis player wakes up, he hovers behind the detective with a determined look on his face. He asks what’s going on and refuses to move until Shuichi answers.

“Are you on about the pods not working?” Shuichi asks and Kaede wonders if Shuichi is acting dumb or genuinely doesn’t know what Ryoma is referring to. The detective obviously hasn’t slept all night and Kaede worries that he’s just going to remain silent for even longer. “Because I really don’t know how to explain that.”

“I’ve already been told that Shirogane caused the pods to glitch,” Ryoma says, narrowing his eyes. “What I want to know is why you’re keeping us all here. I refuse to accept that I left one hell just to join another.”

“You’re safe here,” Shuichi tells him. “I’m doing everything I can to make sure that nothing will happen to any of you-”

“Cut the cryptic bullshit,” Ryoma snaps. “And instead tell us *what* you’re protecting us from. You can’t just keep people trapped in an office and expect no one to ask any questions. The least you can do is give everyone a proper explanation.”

Ryoma is being absolutely relentless and Kaede can’t help but feel relieved that he’s here. She’s always liked him and she greatly appreciates his ‘no bullshit’ attitude towards everything. Even Shuichi seems to waver as Ryoma stares him down with an intensity that rivals Maki’s.

Shuichi opens his mouth and Kaede can already see that he’s about to say his usual spiel about how he can’t answer anything right now. Ryoma also realises this and says, “and don’t give me the same bullshit that you don’t want to talk right now. I really don’t care.”

“...I’m trying to stop another killing game from happening,” Shuichi suddenly answers.

Kaede blinks. Oh? She hasn’t heard him use this excuse before.

Ryoma cocks his head to the side. “Hah? What are you on about? If you wanted to prevent another killing game from happening then you’d be trying harder to fix the pods so everyone can leave-”

“I’m on about a different killing game,” Shuichi says.

“A-Another killing game is going to happen?” Himiko stammers. “Where?”

Shuichi massages his temple with a grimace. “Here.” He gestures around the room.

“Can you stop being so obscure?” Ryoma clicks his tongue. “Another killing game is *already* happening. Shirogane has already started her stupid motive.”

Shuichi shakes his head. “Shirogane is the least of our worries-”

“How can you say that?” Ryoma jabs a finger at Shuichi’s monitor. “You need to fix that so we can stop Shirogane from causing even more needless suffering. You already failed to apprehend her when you had the chance. Do you realise how difficult it was to get her out of the game? Why did no one stop her?”

“Everything happened so fast,” Himiko murmurs, wrapping her arms around herself. Her bottom lip starts to wobble. “We didn’t have much time to react. A-At least Harukawa managed to get into the simulation. She’ll keep everyone safe.”

Ryoma looks at her and his face softens. At least he’s not taking his anger out on everyone. The only person he’s truly annoyed with is Shuichi and that’s because he’s being annoyingly vague. Even Kaede is finding that her patience is starting to wear thin.

The tennis player sighs. “At least let Iruma take a look at the monitor. If anyone can fix it, it’s her.”

“Fuck yeah I can,” Miu agrees. “All everyone has to do is get on their hands and knees and beg for me to...” Miu laughs nervously as Ryoma shoots her an unimpressed look. She clears her throat. “W-We can talk about what I get out of all of this later. I mean, I’m already bored out of my fucking mind so fixing the pods will be something to do anyway.”

“You’ll let Iruma fix everything, right?” Kaede presses when Shuichi doesn’t answer. “Since the hole in the wall is still there, once everything is fixed, everyone will be able to leave right away.”

“And we’re working against a time limit too,” Rantaro adds. “So the sooner Iruma starts, the better.”

Shuichi looks Miu up and down. “T-The coding is pretty messed up because of Shirogane-”

“Psh, *and?*” Miu rolls her eyes as she elbows him out of the way. Shuichi yelps as he’s almost knocked onto the floor. “Do you know who the fuck I am? Fixing the coding will be child’s play!”

Her eyes roam up and down the monitor and her fingers are already twitching above the keyboard. Ryoma leans in closer to get a better look. “Do you think you can fix everything?”

“Hah? Are you deaf? I just said I could fix everything!” Miu starts to scroll through the coding and groans. “But it might take a while because Shirogane really fucked up the coding. I can’t just delete everything because who the hell knows what that might do. I’ll have to go through every individual line and manually remove every anomaly and that shit will definitely take a while.”

“But you can fix everything before the time limit is up, right?” Kaede asks.

“Are you doubting me?” Miu cracks her knuckles. “Fuck you, I can fix this shit in my sleep! I’ll even do you all a solid and fix the glitch whilst I’m at it. Might as fucking well since you’re all wringing me dry in the first place.”

Despite acting like she’s the one being hard done by, Kaede senses that Miu would’ve fixed the coding anyway without being asked. Whether that’s because she cares about everyone or because her inner inventor is screaming at her to, Kaede isn’t entirely sure. “Really?! Thank you so much!”

Miu yelps as Kaede suddenly embraces her. The inventor’s cheeks turn a dusty pink as her hands hover above Kaede’s shoulders. “H-Hee...”

“Are you sure you can fix everything though?” Shuichi questions. He looks at the monitor with a distraught look on his face. “The coding looks really complicated-”

“You only think that because you’re a dumbass virgin,” Miu grumbles. She slaps his hand away when he tries to point at the monitor. “Move your pervy hands away from me and go and find something to occupy yourself with, Sushara.”

Kaede senses that she won’t be able to talk to Miu for a while as the inventor starts to type furiously, her hands morphing into blurs as she starts to go through all of the coding. As Kaede watches the monitor, she becomes grateful that there’s someone around now who knows how to work with computers. She wonders if she can dare to hope that everything will turn out okay.

“You never answered me properly,” Ryoma suddenly points out as Shuichi reluctantly moves away from the monitor. He’s probably worried that if he stays too close then Miu might elbow him due to her sporadic movements.

“About what?”

Ryoma’s eyes turn dull. “You said that you’re trying to prevent a different killing game. Care to elaborate what you meant by that?”

“...no,” Shuichi answers.

“No?” Ryoma scoffs. “Tough shit, I think you owe it to everyone to at least-”

“Excuse me, I need to use the bathroom.” Shuichi turns away and walks off before anyone else can say anything.

Ryoma raises an incredulous eyebrow. “You can’t just-”

Kaede jumps along with Himiko as the bathroom door is slammed shut. The mage looks worried as she clasps her hands together.

“He’s hiding something serious, isn’t he?” Himiko whispers. She looks desperate, as if she wants someone to tell her she’s wrong. No one corrects her.

—

Kaede finds Ryoma sitting on the edge of the rooftop during the early hours of the morning. After waking up and realising he was missing, she initially thought he left the office through the door. However, when she saw that one of the windows was slightly ajar, she knew where he was right away.

She joins him silently, dangling her legs over the side of the building as she clasps her hands in her lap. Ryoma looks her up and down before looking back up at the sky with a hard to read expression.

It’s a quiet night. Kaede occasionally hears the sound of a car driving past but that’s about it. In the distance, she sees street lights that twinkle like the stars in the sky.

“Hey,” Kaede says. She appreciates the cool breeze that brushes against her skin, calming her down. Maybe that’s why Ryoma is up here. There’s something peaceful about gazing up at the sky at such a height. The stars look like they’re almost in reaching distance.

Ryoma waits before giving her a slight nod as a greeting. “Hey.”

“Dumb question but are you okay?” Kaede asks, smiling weakly as Ryoma’s brow raises ever so slightly. “Hey, I *did* say I was going to ask a dumb question.”

“You did,” Ryoma agrees. He shoves his hands into his pockets. The hoodie he’s wearing is just that bit too big for him. It swamps his body but at least it isn’t overly huge. “I’m...”

Sad. Tired. Melancholic. Frustrated. Trying.

“I’m really sorry about what happened,” Kaede says, being purposefully vague so that her apology can apply to pretty much everything that has happened to Ryoma. She doubts he wants her to list out everything.

Ryoma hums. “Thanks.”

“You know, I was friends with Chabashira and Kaito too during my game,” Kaede reveals. She knows she’s caught Ryoma’s attention as he looks up at her curiously. “Chabashira looked after me when I was down and Kaito made me his sidekick.”

Ryoma barks out a sudden laugh. “That guy...never found out why he was so obsessed with turning everyone into his sidekick.”

“I think that was his way of telling people he was going to look after them,” Kaede says with a smile. “He was, no, *is* really good at making people feel safe.”

“You can say that again.” Ryoma returns his attention back to the stars. “Always thought he could get a little too intense but I could tell he had the right intentions. He...was a good guy.”

Was. The Kaito that Ryoma was friends with no longer exists. Kaede swallows. “I miss him too. The Kaito that made me his sidekick. Knowing that he’s still alive in a pod is somewhat of a relief but you know...”

Ryoma sighs. “You said earlier that he gave up his life for you, right?”

Kaede nods with a bittersweet smile. “Yeah, we didn’t know about the wall at the time and everything happened so fast. He just...gave himself up before Amami and I could even argue.”

“Tch, always playing the hero right until the very end,” Ryoma murmurs. “Can’t help but be furious with him for being the sort of person who throws his life away to save others.” He wrinkles his nose. “Then again it’s not like I can control what he does either. He can be a stubborn guy at times.”

“Are you...still mad with him?” Kaede asks tentatively.

Ryoma easily understands what she’s referring to. “For staying with Ouma?” He pauses with a thoughtful look on his face before shaking his head. “Both of them were struggling to move, right? At least I know they tried right until the very end. That’s all I could’ve asked for.”

His eyes turn misty and Kaede starts to panic. “I-I didn’t mean to upset you!”

“I’m not upset,” Ryoma insists as he dabs at his eyes with his sleeve. “I just...I’m going to miss them all. Momota, Ouma, Chabashira. They were the first real friends that I had in a very long time.”

Seeing him barely manage to hold back tears makes Kaede want to do the impossible and find a way to bring his friends back. It pains her knowing there’s nothing she can do to truly help. “Of course you’re going to miss them.”

“It doesn’t help that it feels like their deaths were such a waste,” Ryoma suddenly says. “I just want

to know why we're being kept in the office. It's Saihara who wants us all to stay here, right? Has he actually not told any of you why?"

"I think Harukawa and Kiibo know why we're not allowed to leave." When Ryoma raises an eyebrow at Maki's name, Kaede elaborates. "Ah, Harukawa is the one who got inside the simulation, remember?"

"The assassin?" Ryoma asks and Kaede nods. Finding out Maki's talent is the Ultimate Assassin was a plot twist Kaede never saw coming. No wonder Kaede always found her glares so terrifying. "I suppose she'll keep Shirogane on her toes at least."

Maki has already tried to strangle Tsumugi once.

"You think Saihara will eventually spill the beans?" Ryoma asks her. "Something just doesn't sit right with me about him. I know he's hiding something but I can't figure out what." He huffs. "Although I can't help but believe him when he said he's trying to stop a different killing game. I like to think I can tell when someone is telling the truth or lying."

"Believe me, I've tried to ask him what's going on before and he just clams up," Kaede sighs. "And I don't want to lose my patience with him but I'm really struggling to deal with his evasiveness."

"He'll crack soon," Ryoma says. "Can't say I know him all that well but with the way he refuses to look anyone in the eye, someone like him can't keep a secret for too long without breaking."

"I want him to tell us everything on his own terms though," Kaede says. She remembers Kokichi's face when he had broken down in front of Ryoma and Miu. "Just because I'm annoyed with him doesn't mean I want him to struggle in silence."

"Suppose we can always press Kiibo for answers but he's always coincidentally on standby mode when I'm around," Ryoma says with a click of his tongue. "Tch, those two guys still have a ways to go."

The two end up gazing up at the stars in a comfortable silence for the rest of the night.

—

Kaede calls Rantaro by his first name by accident.

Herself, Rantaro, Himiko and Ryoma are eating a rather lousy snack when Kaede says, "hey Rantaro, can you pass me a water bottle?"

As Kaede stammers out an apology, Rantaro laughs. "*Rantaro*, hmm?"

"S-Sorry, it just slipped out! I call Himiko by her first name and since we've been talking about Kaito a lot I've just gotten used to using everyone's first names."

"Well I don't see any reason why you should stop," Rantaro says to her surprise. "Unless you want to?"

"No!" Kaede smiles brightly. She likes that she's starting to get closer to everyone. "But you have to call me Kaede, okay?"

"Ka-e-de." Rantaro tests her name out slowly and Kaede almost feels like she's being teased. "Yep, that's easy to say."

Kaede feels like she's missing out on something when Ryoma and Himiko look at each other with the same smug expression. It's almost as if they're both in on something that Kaede isn't. At least Rantaro looks just as confused as she feels.

She's about to ask them what they're both smiling about when Miu all but drags Ryoma to the bathroom to quote on quote, *'talk to him in private because he's the only fucker she trusts around here.'*

Kaede doesn't mean to listen in but since everyone is pretty close to the bathroom door and Miu is talking very loud, she ends up hearing everything regardless.

"Is everything okay, Iruma?"

"If everything was okay I wouldn't have dragged you in here! Of course everything isn't fucking okay!"

"Are you going to elaborate?"

"It's about the damn coding, well if we're being real fucking specific, the glitch."

"Can you not fix it?"

Miu pauses and Kaede feels anxiety swell in her chest. "Hoshi, there's no glitch to fix."

"Hah?"

Kaede freezes.

"What do you mean there's no glitch to fix?"

"What I fucking mean is that sure, Shirogane fucked up everything by smashing the keyboard like some sort of keyboard warrior but that issue can be sorted out by deleting everything she added. I thought whilst I was going through everything, I might as well see if I could spot anything that would cause any glitches to happen."

"And?"

"The coding is fine. There is literally nothing wrong with it that would cause the game to glitch accidentally."

"...accidentally?"

"The only reason why the game is looping is because someone literally wrote it in the coding for that to happen. There's absolutely *nothing* causing the program to freak out. The program is running perfectly."

"And you're completely sure about this?"

"Positive! The reason why the game is looping is because of one measly line of coding that can be easily changed."

"Have you not changed it?"

"I-I kind of panicked when I realised this and forgot to actually apply all of the changes I made--"

"Iruma."

“H-Hee, don’t look at me like that! I-I also found something that I needed to show you too!”

“...a piece of paper?”

“Look what’s written on it, dumbass!”

“...what is this?”

“It’s a line of code, you idiot! More specifically, it’s a line of code that once added into the program, will turn the loops off! Don’t you fucking realise what this means?! I found this fucker in the office so that means someone here has known for fuck knows how long how to fix the loops and have done jack all to help everyone!”

“...are you being serious right now?”

“Why the fuck would I lie about something like this?! Hoshi, how the hell can we trust any of those assholes in the office when they’re the ones who have been keeping us trapped?! They could’ve helped us ages ago and didn’t!”

“...alright, *that’s it.*”

“W-Wait!”

Kaede jumps back as Ryoma storms out of the bathroom with a slip of paper crunched tightly in his hand. Miu follows after him nervously, painfully wary as she passes the group. Ryoma walks past everyone and heads straight for Shuichi, who is on the blankets looking up at the ceiling. When he spots Ryoma’s furious expression, he sits up.

“Hoshi? What’s wrong?”

“This is yours, isn’t it?” Ryoma shows the detective the slip of paper.

Kaede hopes that Ryoma is just jumping to conclusions, that the piece of paper Miu found has perhaps just been hidden all this time so now one knew about it. However, when Shuichi’s eyes go wide and he slips his hand into his pocket as if to look for something, Kaede knows that piece of paper is undoubtedly Shuichi’s.

“Where did you find that?” Shuichi tries to grab the paper but Ryoma holds it out of his reach.

“It was on the floor by the monitor,” Miu says with a sneer. “Must’ve fallen out of your pocket, dumbass.”

“Saihara?” Himiko hesitantly approaches the blankets. “What’s going on?”

“This asshole is the main reason why no one has been able to leave!” Miu answers before Shuichi can’t say anything. She jabs a trembling finger at the detective. “What the hell is your problem?!”

“M-Maybe all of this is just one big misunderstanding?” Himiko suggests quietly. “Saihara wouldn’t purposefully-”

“There’s instructions on not only where to add the code but also how to add it too,” Ryoma tells her, showing her the piece of paper. “So it’s not like Saihara hasn’t been able to do anything about the loops all this time.”

“I-I...” Shuichi looks like a corned wild animal, eyes wide and skin clammy.

“You could’ve put a stop to all of this at any time?” Rantaro asks. He sounds more surprised than angry.

“I *couldn’t!*” Shuichi insists.

“Bullshit! I know you’re stupid but any fucker with a brain would’ve been able to follow the instructions!” Miu shouts. “How fucking dare you! Don’t you know how much shit I’ve been through?! And for *what?!?*”

“Saihara...” Kaede grimaces when he looks at her desperately. “I don’t understand. All this time you could’ve...”

“Either you explain yourself or I’m leaving the office and to find answers elsewhere,” Ryoma snaps, causing Shuichi to snap his head over into his direction. “I’m serious. Either you confess or I’m leaving.”

“...I needed more time.”

Kiibo approaches the group apprehensively, fumbling with his hands as he stands by Shuichi. “Saihara, are we finally going to tell everyone the truth?”

“...well it seems like there’s no other option,” Shuichi says with a humourless laugh. He swallows before sighing. “Team Danganronpa are planning another season of Danganronpa and need this office so that they can start preparing it for the next set of contestants.”

“Nyah?” It looks like all of the energy has been zapped from Himiko.

“You all already know that I took the keys to the office when I woke up and locked us all in here. It was only supposed to be for a little while,” Shuichi admits. The more he talks, the more his shoulders slump, as if a heavy weight is being lifted from them. “Team Danganronpa weren’t happy that I had essentially taken the office from them but I suppose they were rather lax about it considering how intense the end of our game was. Since they knew Kiibo was also in the office...”

“They knew I’d be able to take care of everyone for a little while whilst they calmed down,” Kiibo says. “Additionally, I also know how to take care of the pods, meaning they didn’t have to worry about everyone still inside the simulation.”

“We never meant to lie about the game being glitched. In fact, when Amami came to the conclusion that there must be some sort of glitch during Akamatsu’s game, I guess we just decided to play along with that idea,” Shuichi continues.

“But you knew that there wasn’t at that point, right?” Ryoma asks.

Shuichi winces before nodding. “Maybe two or three nights after waking up, there was a knock at the door. Both Yumeno and Harukawa were sleeping and I suppose I was curious about who wanted to talk to us. It was a member of Team Danganronpa and they asked me if I was willing to talk.” He closes his eyes. “Turns out, they wanted to do more than talk. They wanted to negotiate.”

“You’ve been leaving the office to...negotiate?” Rantaro raises an eyebrow. “I don’t think I understand.”

“They made it very clear that they wanted the office vacated as soon as possible,” Shuichi says. “They told me that they need it so they can start preparations for the fifty fourth season. Of course I told them that wouldn’t be possible because why on earth would I let them continue to host killing games? They anticipated my answer and told me I was free to return to the office and think

things over. Before I left however, they gave me that slip of paper with the coding on it, saying that they figured out how to fix the looping problem.”

“Then why didn’t you?” Kaede asks. “You could’ve stopped the loops such a long time ago. So many more people could be here right now-”

“They let it slip that no one can be brought out of the simulation whilst a game is occurring,” Shuichi interjects. “The only way for a person to wake up is for them to either survive or die. Or...go through the wall if push comes to shove. They knew at least one more game would inevitably happen but weren’t too worried since a game lasts around two weeks at most. I think they assumed that I would fix the coding right away so they could finally have access to the pods but...”

“That doesn’t answer my question though!” Kaede feels her eyes burn with frustrated tears.

Shuichi takes a deep breath. Despite everything, he looks calm. “I know that the moment everyone wakes up, Team Danganronpa will forcibly remove us from the office. I refuse to let them host another killing game. I refuse to let them hurt more vulnerable people.”

“*You’ve* been hurting people by allowing the games to continue,” Ryoma points out bluntly.

“...I had no better alternative,” Shuichi whispers. “They gave me enough food and water for three people since they thought I would fix the coding. If I had brought everyone out right away then we would’ve only lasted a couple of days at best in the office. I-I’m not saying that’s the main reason why I kept everyone in the simulation but...” He runs a nervous hand through his hair. “I thought I would’ve been able to negotiate some sort of deal with them by now. I thought if I tried hard enough then maybe they’d stop Danganronpa altogether-”

“Are you stupid?!” Miu barks out.

“You’ve kept everyone trapped because you thought you could put an end to Danganronpa?” Kaede feels the sudden urge to sit down before she falls down. Is such a feat even possible? From the sounds of it, Danganronpa is a beloved show enjoyed by the entire *world*. Yet Shuichi thinks he can put an end to it?

“I thought I already had,” Shuichi says. “But when I woke up and found out that they were planning another season, I knew I just couldn’t let them have their own way. When I told them that the line of code they gave me wasn’t working, they had no other choice but to continue to negotiate with me.”

“So you’re...trying to end Danganronpa with even more killing games?” Ryoma stares at Shuichi as if he’s just grown a second head. “How does that even make any sense?”

“The pods can’t be reprogrammed if they’re occupied,” Shuichi points out. “And...I took advantage of the fact the simulation is looping the games. If everyone left the game in pairs then I thought that would’ve given me enough time to come up with some sort of agreement-”

“You were hoping that only two people would survive at a time?!” Miu yells in disbelief. “What the *fuck*, Saihara?”

“Did Harukawa know about all this?!” Himiko asks, she pushes her way to the front of the group. “Did all three of you hide all of this from me this entire time?!”

“Harukawa...found out I had been leaving the office a couple of days after I received the coding,” Shuichi tells her apologetically. “She knew that I wanted everyone to leave in pairs but she didn’t

know that I knew how to fix the coding. I think if she did then she would've re-joined the simulation a lot sooner."

"Why didn't you all just re-join and tell us what was going on?" Rantaro sighs. He pinches the bridge of his nose. "So much suffering could've been avoided if--"

"Do you think I wanted everyone to suffer?!" Shuichi retaliates. He puts a hand to his chest. "I knew what the price was when I decided to let the games loop. I-I...couldn't willingly let people throw themselves back into the simulation when I knew there was a slim possibility they'd survive."

"But isn't that what you want? More fuel to keep the games going?" Ryoma grumbles sarcastically.

"No!" Shuichi shakes his head adamantly. "I know I wanted to keep the games going but I also wasn't about to let people needlessly suffer more than they had to! Once people left the simulation, that was it. I wasn't going to let people re-join it."

"You still could have re-joined yourself to tell everyone what you were doing," Rantaro points out coldly.

"I-I needed to negotiate--"

"Okay, someone else then."

"I didn't want to sacrifice everyone's memories!" Shuichi argues, wincing as Ryoma glares at him. "It's cruel but I know everyone who dies has no chance of regaining their memories. The very least I could do was help preserve the memories of everyone who survived!"

"That wasn't your choice to make though," Ryoma growls. "You say that you care but if you did then you wouldn't have allowed more than one game to happen. The game I was in should've *never* happened. My friends should've never *died*."

"Hoshi, I really am sorry--"

"I bet you were devastated when Ouma took down the wall," Ryoma says. "But once Shirogane caused an actual glitch to happen, you were over the moon, weren't you?"

"N-No, that's wrong!"

"I don't want your apologies. I want you to open your goddamn eyes and face the facts," Ryoma huffs. He looks at Kiibo with an irritated scowl. "Couldn't you have done something, huh? Don't know how robots or machines work but couldn't you have transferred your memories over to the Kiibo in the simulation?"

"I tried. I was unsuccessful," Kiibo answers.

Ryoma narrows his eyes before exhaling noisily through his nose. "You both put everyone through hell just so Saihara could have pointless arguments with people who are running a game that is popular world wide? You have to realise how...how crazy this all sounds."

"I-I think I'm getting somewhere," Shuichi insists, wringing his hands. "They're finally discussing the possibility of retiring Danganronpa but--"

"If they wanted to stop Danganronpa, then they would've stopped it by now," Ryoma snaps.

“What season are we from again? Fifty three? Doesn’t that give you a hint as to how successful this series is? If people are still watching a series after this long then doesn’t that clue you in on how unlikely you are to win?”

“Saihara, he’s right,” Kaede says. “I understand that you’re desperate to stop another season from happening but don’t you think what you’re trying to accomplish is impossible?”

The pianist gasps as Shuichi gathers up her hands and looks her in the eyes, eyes wide and earnest. “The impossible is possible! All you gotta do is make it so!”

Shuichi looks like a completely different person. He no longer looks like the anxious detective who has been haunting the office like a ghost. He looks like he’s determined to fight Team Danganronpa *and* win. He squeezes Kaede’s hands enthusiastically.

“We can still use our lives to end Danganronpa, it’s not too late!” He looks around the room encouragingly. “I wholeheartedly believe that once everyone in the game finds out what I’m trying to do, they’ll understand why I did what I did. If they were around during my sixth trial, they also would’ve given up their lives so-”

“You kept everyone trapped under the presumption that you think they’d...give up their lives to end Danganronpa?” Rantaro shakes his head helplessly.

“Just how many lives are you wanting everyone to give up?” Miu whimpers. “For some people, this is their *fourth* game-”

“You were all determined to leave because you didn’t want to participate in Danganronpa, right?” Shuichi licks his lips. “We have one last chance to put a stop to everything and I...I did what I had to to give us the best fighting chance possible.”

“No, you gave *yourself* the best fighting chance. You didn’t even want to tell everyone about what you’re up to,” Rantaro argues. “And you even wanted to cover your tracks by telling everyone that the killing games were being shown to the public. You did that to make us think Team Danganronpa was responsible for the loops, didn’t you?”

“I...I wanted you all to feel the same hatred I feel towards Danganronpa,” Shuichi admits.

Ryoma runs a hand down his face. “You didn’t need to lie about that to get us to hate Danganronpa. Face it, Amami’s right. You were only trying to obscure the truth with lies so people wouldn’t find out about you keeping everyone trapped. You know what you’re doing is wrong, you wouldn’t have spread that lie otherwise.”

“S-Sometimes you have to take risks to get what you want,” Shuichi insists.

“You’re twisting Momota’s words!” Himiko suddenly shouts. “You keep saying things he would say but Momota never would’ve wanted this! He never would’ve made his friends suffer!”

Shuichi shakes his head adamantly as he lets go of Kaede’s hands. “You’re wrong, Momota would do *anything* to save people-”

“No, *you’re* wrong!” Himiko’s fists shake as her face turns red. “You’re Momota’s first ever sidekick so you should know him the best! Momota never would’ve sacrificed anyone to achieve his goals! You of all people know this! That’s why he got out of the Exisal when he did during the fifth trial!”

Shuichi falters before taking a deep breath. “Momota trusted me and my detective work so I

believe in him and his beliefs. If I believe that I can negotiate a deal with Team Danganronpa and put an end to the killing games then that means it will happen.”

“Christ, Saihara...” Ryoma’s anger has dissipated into something akin to pity. “I think you’ve completely warped your view on Momota’s ideology.”

“That or he’s just become completely delusional,” Miu mutters.

Ryoma elbows her. “I get it, Momota can be reckless but I know without a doubt he never would’ve done something as extreme as this.”

Shuichi smiles bitterly. “I truly have hated watching everyone go through game after game. But once I realised how much time I needed...everything just spiralled from there. I could’ve put a stop to all of this sooner but...please, just look at the bigger picture. If you had to pick between stopping a simulation where you know no one truly dies if they die in it or putting a stop to the killing games altogether, what would you pick?”

“You...can’t just expect us to give you an answer right away,” Kaede murmurs as Shuichi looks at her expectantly.

“That’s the point I’m trying to make. I never had any time to think either before I realised what I had to do,” Shuichi says. He chews his lip. “I just made a decision and...had to live with it.”

“You said none of us deserved to know the truth,” Kaede says. “By that did you mean...”

“I wouldn’t wish what I’ve had to put up with on anyone,” Shuichi tells her. “I-I’m not saying everyone else hasn’t been suffering. Hell, I know what it’s like to be in a killing game. But none of you needed to deal with the stress of arguing with Team Danganronpa on top of that.”

“Have you been arguing with them on your own the entire time?” Himiko asks weakly.

Shuichi nods. “I needed Kiibo to keep the office safe if anything happened and I couldn’t ask Harukawa to go through something so horrible. Team Danganronpa...they’re truly not nice people.”

Rantaro pinches the bridge of his nose with a frown. “Out of absolutely everything I didn’t think...”

“That someone we’re supposed to trust is the entire reason why we’re stuck in such a mess,” Kaede finishes.

“B-But Saihara wasn’t the one who caused the loops in the first place. He just...never stopped them either,” Himiko points out.

“Did you ever find out who was responsible for the loops?” Ryoma asks.

Shuichi shakes his head. “No one knows. Presumably it was someone who had access to the office during the preparations of the fifty third season.”

“I still can’t fucking wrap my head around all of this,” Miu grumbles.

“I know all of this is a lot to take in but all of you don’t need to worry. I’m not expecting any of you to do anything, in fact, it’s probably for the best if you all continue to stay in the office,” Shuichi says. “If Team Danganronpa finds out that anyone other than Harukawa and Yumeno are awake then they might stop negotiating.”

“You want us to just...sit around and wait?” Rantaro blinks.

“No way,” Kaede says. “We need to go back inside and tell everyone what’s going on.”

“Y-You don’t want to bring everyone out, right?” Shuichi looks panicked. “I’ve already said that we don’t have the supplies to keep everyone healthy-”

“If I’m being honest, Saihara, I really don’t know *what* I want to tell everyone at the moment,” Kaede admits as she heads into the monitor room to check on everyone. “I...think I understand what you’ve been trying to do but...I really don’t agree with what you’ve done. At all.”

“That’s fine but I still want to try,” Shuichi says, following her. “I still believe I can end Danganronpa for real this time.”

Kaede sighs warily and is about to respond when something catches her eye. On one of the monitors, she spots Kokichi lying in a pile of glass as Maki prowls towards Kaito. Her breath catches in her throat and she runs back into the office.

“Iruma, have you fixed the coding yet?!”

“H-Hah?!” Miu jumps at Kaede’s sudden entrance. “A-All I have to do is apply all of the changes I’ve made and-”

“Then *do it!*”

“D-Don’t yell at me!” Miu cries but heads towards the monitor and keyboard to fix everything all the same.

“Kaede, what’s wrong?” Rantaro asks her.

“Harukawa...I think there’s something wrong with Harukawa. It looks like she’s been attacking people,” Kaede says. “We need to go in and help! I think Ouma is hurt.”

“Ouma?” Ryoma’s eyes go wide. He turns to Miu. “Iruma, you won’t take too long, right?”

“I just need to click a couple buttons!” Miu huffs.

“Are you all...going back in?” Shuichi asks. He doesn’t sound panicked but rather defeated, as if he knows even if he does argue then no one will listen to him, especially not now.

“Of course we are!” Kaede responds. “We should go in and...bring Ouma, Harukawa and Momota out since they look hurt. After that...”

“...we’ll bring them back into the simulation and explain to everyone what’s going on,” Rantaro finishes. He gives the office a withering look. “Quite frankly, I’m sick of this place.”

“What are you going to tell everyone?” Shuichi asks, wringing his hands together.

“I’ll...figure that out later,” Kaede asks. She’s almost surprised at how cold her voice sounds. “But for now, making sure everyone is safe is my number one priority. If you will excuse me.”

When Miu announces that the pods are up and running again, Kaede and Rantaro are the first to reach theirs. Kaede spots Himiko head towards her own with a determined look in her eyes. When she notices Kaede staring, she nods her head.

“Hey, Kaede?” Rantaro stops her before she steps inside. “Find me as soon as you load in, okay?”

“Okay.”

Kaede expects to feel some sort of fear when she closes the pod door behind her. Instead, as she's loaded back into the very same simulation she had tried so hard to escape once upon a time, all she can feel is determination running through her veins.

Final Loop - Chapter 2 Part 1

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the slight wait :)

Thank you to everyone who left a kudo on this fic and an extra thank you to everyone who has left a comment!

I'd like to apologise in advance if there are any mistakes. I try my best to edit them all out but sometimes I miss a few regardless :.)

Thank you for reading! I hope you all have a nice day!

The first thing Kaito hears is the sound of hissing. He blinks slowly as the world waits for him to wake up. To his side, he hears murmuring before a loud shriek and a crash. He jolts and his eyes snap wide open.

“Ah, please just hold on for a second, Momota!”

“...huh?” His vision slowly starts to unblur and everything stops being one huge unidentifiable mess. Kaito sees something that looks like a pod in front of him, closed with something that looks like a body inside of it. All he can do is blink owlily and stare intensely.

“Damn, kid. You sure know how to make an entrance.”

Kaito raises an eyebrow at the gruff voice and pokes his head forward ever so slightly. His gut is yelling at him to jump out of his pod and figure out where the hell he is. Just a couple of seconds ago he was stepping into a bright light with Kokichi in his arms and...

Wait, where *is* Kokichi? Whilst Kaito has no idea what's going on right now, one thing he does know for sure is that he's definitely no longer cradling the smaller male to his chest. His hands are empty.

The astronaut blinks slowly as he spots a couple of people close to where he is. He sees a pod which is wide open and someone sprawled out on the floor directly in front of it, their black hair splayed across their shoulders. Since they are currently face first against the floor, Kaito can't exactly tell who he is looking at. The figure crouching down next to them with a sympathetic look on their face actually looks kind of familiar. They're small and have the same stature of this tennis player Kaito used to look up to when he was still in school.

Kaito jumps as his vision is suddenly filled with grey. He almost lets out a yell but manages to stop himself because that would be very unmanly of him and Kaito is a very manly man. A pair of cyan eyes stare at him and Kaito pauses.

“Kiibo?” Kaito is surprised by how rough he sounds but doesn't think anything of it. “I didn't know you left the game too.”

“Oh, I...” Kiibo pulls a face before looking down at the figure on the floor with a grimace. “Well, you see...”

“Kaito!” Before Kiibo can say anything else, Kaede nudges the robot to the side so that she’s standing in front of him instead. She smiles nervously as Kaito looks her up and down with a raised eyebrow. “Sorry, I should’ve warned you about all of this. Just, ah, don’t try to move right away. My legs felt like jelly when I first woke up.” She giggles shyly. “In fact, I fell out of my pod.”

Huh. He supposes his legs *do* feel pretty wobbly. He’s glad that he’s currently laid back. He thinks if he was standing up straight then his head would be spinning. “Hey...what happened to your hair?” He narrows his eyes. “And your eyes. They look...different.”

“Don’t worry about that for now,” Kaede tells him. She looks over her shoulder and down at the floor with a sympathetic look in her eyes. “Are you doing okay down there, Ouma?”

Kokichi? Kaito blinks rapidly, hoping that perhaps his vision is just playing up at the moment. The guy on the floor can’t be Kokichi because Kokichi has purple hair. The guy on the floor has black hair, although Kaito supposes their hair also arches near the tips like Kokichi’s does. He watches as the guy, who is apparently Kokichi, holds up a skyward thumb all the while keeping his face pressed against the floor.

Did the shriek he heard earlier come from Kokichi when he fell onto the floor? Kaito is starting to think that might be the case.

Kaede rolls her eyes playfully and turns to the guy crouching next to Kokichi. “Did you not load in with everyone else, Hoshi?”

Hoshi? As in Ryoma Hoshi, the Ultimate Tennis Pro? Aw man, Kaito knows this guy from when he was in a tennis club years ago! Well, he doesn’t know him personally. He *knew* of him. Man, what the hell is someone like Ryoma doing here? Last Kaito heard, the guy was in jail for taking out the mafia with a single racket and ball. That’s not to say Kaito stopped admiring him though.

Wow, of all the places to meet your childhood hero. What a small world.

“Knew a lot of people would be loading in at once so I thought I’d hang back and help,” Ryoma says. He gestures to somewhere else Kaito can’t see with his head. “He never went back into the simulation either.”

Who is this mysterious person? Kaito desperately wants to hop from his pod and look for the person himself but one strict look from Kaede keeps him from jumping to his feet.

“Ugh...Tenko’s head hurts.”

He hears Tenko muttering to herself a couple of pods down. He can’t see her so she must’ve not fallen onto the floor like Kokichi had. Kaito can’t help himself. “Hey, Chabashira!”

“Ack!” He hears Tenko suck in a sharp breath before huffing loudly. “Momota, what the heck?! You scared Tenko!” There’s a pause. “Actually, where are you?”

“I’m over here!” Kaito unhelpfully tells her before realising that she probably has no clue where he means.

He can hear the exasperation in her voice. “You’re not being very helpful!”

Kaito winces and feels an apology crawl up his throat when something stops him. He sees Ryoma looking up at him with wide eyes and Kaito smiles nervously. Huh, why is Ryoma Hoshi staring at him like he knows who he is? Have they...met before? Honestly, after everything that has happened, something like this doesn’t even surprise Kaito. He waves apprehensively and straight

away realises how heavy his bones feel.

“Oh, hey!” Kaito puts his hand down quickly so it doesn’t end up flopping to his side uselessly. Ryoma continues to stare at him silently. “Um...you good, man? You look like you’ve just seen a ghost.” Kaito shudders. “There are...no ghosts here, right?”

Even as Ryoma nods wordlessly, Kaito doesn’t feel as reassured as he hoped. He doesn’t want to call the atmosphere awkward since his younger self would’ve jumped for joy if Ryoma looked in his direction but there’s something...kind of strange about the way Ryoma is looking at him. Kaito feels like he’s perhaps forgetting something really important, that there must be a reason why Ryoma looks like he’s seconds away from bursting into tears.

Only, Ryoma doesn’t. He clears his throat and goes back to rubbing Kokichi’s back soothingly. Kaito almost misses Kokichi quietly groaning on the floor but when he eventually hears him, he frowns. “Dude, are you okay?”

Since Kokichi doesn’t lift his head up, Kaito assumes Kokichi doesn’t know that Kaito is trying to talk to him. The astronaut pulls a face and wonders when the hell he can step out of his pod since all this waiting around is starting to get tedious.

“He jumped out before any of us could stop him,” Ryoma explains to Kaito. “I’m guessing falling to the floor so quickly left him feeling quite lightheaded.”

“I’ll help move him when he feels better,” Kiibo reassures the tennis player. Ryoma looks at Kiibo doubtfully and the robot wrings his hands together. “I promise I will but if we try to move him now...”

“I’ll throw up on you all,” Kokichi grumbles from the floor.

Kaito pouts and turns to Kaede. “Is he still sick? I thought you said leaving the game would cure him?”

“I...think he’s been cured of Despair Disease,” Kaede murmurs, rubbing her chin.

“He’s not *sick*, sick,” Ryoma tells him. “People react differently to waking up. You woke up without any problems, right?” When Kaito nods, Ryoma hums lowly. “And from the looks of it, Chabashira looks okay too. Ouma might’ve been okay if he didn’t try to step out right away.” Ryoma lets out a sigh which sounds far too fond to suggest that he’s annoyed.

Someone stands next to Kaede and Kaito quickly identifies them as Maki since the person has long brown hair. Only the girl’s brown eyes makes Kaito doubt his deduction somewhat. However, when the girl starts speaking, he knows he has to be right. “Momota, are you okay?”

“Ah, Harukawa, maybe you should sit down for a couple of minutes?” Kaede suggests. “You look a little pale-”

“Why am I back here?” Maki asks abruptly. “I don’t understand. The last thing I remember doing was getting into bed. It should be impossible for me to be here.”

“Harukawa, please calm down.” Kiibo steps in before Kaede has the chance to answer. “Iruma fixed the wall so people can now leave and join the game whenever they want. You were logged out a couple of minutes ago by Chabashira-”

“I was?” Maki crosses her arms with a scowl. “Why?”

Kaito can practically *feel* the tension as Kaede and Kiibo look at each other awkwardly. He feels a slight phantom pain in his hand from when Maki had plunged a knife into it. He automatically lifts his hand to his face so he can examine it closely. It's a relief to see that there's no longer a great big gaping hole in his hand but his relief turns to ice when something else catches his attention.

There are scars on his arm that he doesn't remember receiving. Kaito frowns as he looks up and down his arm slowly, counting each and every scar one by one. Some scars are big whilst some are tiny. They're randomly spread, suggesting that they're accidental scars rather than ones that were made on purpose. Still, that makes Kaito even more curious about them. He checks his other arm and spots a couple of scars on that one too.

"What the..." Kaito purses his lips as he holds his arms out in front of him. He's no stranger to scars. When training to be an astronaut, he used to run in the fields near his house frequently. There were times where he stumbled and ended up slicing open his skin on abandoned farm equipment. Those always left a silvery mark on his skin. The scars he has now, well, Kaito doesn't think he can recall how he got a single one of them.

"Oh, Kaito..." Kaede's lips thin as she also spots the scars.

"How'd I get these?" Kaito asks her and subconsciously rakes his eyes up and down her arms to see if hers are the same. They're not.

"I really don't know," Kaede answers him helplessly.

"You must've already had them before you joined the game," Kiibo tells him.

"Eh?" Kaito hopes the expression he pulls doesn't look too stupid as he cocks his head to the side. "What do you mean by that? I know what I look like and I know for a fact that I don't recognise a single one of these scars."

Maki steps forward and gives the scars a scrutinising stare. "They look old so you must've had them for a while. Still, I wouldn't worry about them. There's not much you can do about them now anyway."

"Even so..." Kaito almost pouts as he lowers his arms back into the pod. "Man, just what the hell is going on, Kaede? Wait, I can call you Kaede, right?"

Kaede nods cheerfully. "Yeah, of course you can!" Her smile dims. "As for what's going on..."

"I want to know what's going on too," Maki says, causing Kaede to stare at her in surprise. "What happened inside of the simulation? Why did Chabashira have to bring me out?"

"Ah." Kaede winces as she grasps her arm nervously. "Harukawa, you, um, I think you managed to catch Despair Disease from Ouma."

"What." Maki's expression is deadpan as she looks down at Kokichi, who is still on the floor.

"You probably caught it when you went into his room without wearing any protection," Ryoma points out with a frown. "Don't you remember? You went in to clean his whiteboards for whatever reason. You want to explain why you did that?"

Maki's mouth opens and closes sporadically like a fish out of water. "No."

"Maybe she doesn't remember doing that?" Kaito suggests tentatively as Ryoma's frown deepens.

“Hmph.” Ryoma doesn’t look convinced but doesn’t press the issue any further.

It’s a relief to see Maki back to her old self. There’s no longer any malice in her eyes, although her tone of voice could do with some improvement. Still, Maki has always sounded impatient so Kaito doubts he has to worry about her still being sick. If she still was then everyone in this room would be dead by now.

Maki turns to Kaede expectantly. “How are you so certain I managed to catch Despair Disease? I think I would remember catching something so dumb.”

“Well, uh,” Kaede murmurs as she fumbles with her hands, pressing her fingers together. “I don’t really know why you don’t remember, um, maybe that’s just a side effect of having Despair Disease? I just remember seeing you in the monitor room and you were...”

“I was?” Maki raises an eyebrow impatiently.

Kaito swallows as Maki turns to him, clearly wanting to seek answers from someone other than Kaede, who is struggling to form a sentence. He knows there’s no reason to be scared of her now but when their eyes meet, a shudder runs down his spine. Maki almost looks hurt when she notices this and her face falls.

“Momota? What happened?” She almost sounds desperate.

“Just some, ah, things,” Kaito tells her. “Nothing for you to worry about though! What’s done is done so there’s no point-”

“Momota, tell me what I did,” Maki says, clearly jumping to the conclusion that she must’ve done something bad whilst she was sick. It’s almost frustrating that she managed to jump to the right conclusion straight away.

“Harukawa, I’m being serious. There’s really no point-”

“Did I hurt you?”

“Huh?”

“I asked if I hurt you,” Maki tells him. “You wouldn’t be so cagey if I didn’t do something serious, right? If I caught...Despair Disease then that means something happened to my personality and...”

She’s right, something *did* happen to her personality. It’s like she had turned into a killing machine, taking out anything that moved. When she had sorted out the Monokubs, Kaito thought she was the coolest person alive. When she tried to kill him, that thought quickly dissipated into thin air. Still, it wasn’t like she was in control of herself either. Despite everything, her shoving a knife through his hand instead of killing him right away was her way of hesitating, right? Man, Kaito hopes that’s the case.

He must hesitate for too long since Maki finds a new victim to press for answers. “Kiibo, did you see what happened?”

“Not exactly but-”

“Do you know what happened?” Maki rephrases.

“I, uh...” Kiibo looks surprisingly flustered. “Yeah.”

Maki doesn't look impressed. "Instead of saying yeah, tell me what I did-"

"You tried to kill Ouma and Momota."

Ryoma seems to have no qualms about revealing the truth. He has his back to her as he continues to stay crouched by Kokichi's side. Kaito notices that Kokichi's shoulders have suddenly gotten tense. If Maki can't remember anything then does that mean Kokichi is the same?

Kaito winces at Ryoma's blunt words. He can't tell if Ryoma is sick of everyone dancing around the topic or if he's angry. If his rigid shoulders are anything to go by then Kaito thinks that Ryoma is *extremely* angry, although he isn't exactly sure why. At first Kaito thought Ryoma was kneeling by Kokichi to check on him but now he's starting to think that maybe he's guarding him instead.

"Y-You didn't need to word it like that," Kaito stammers. His stomach aches as he spots Maki's wide eyes. He doesn't like seeing such a wounded look on her face. "Besides, she never actually killed either of us so-"

"That doesn't change the fact she still tried," Ryoma points out defensively. The glare he gives Maki is scathing. "You put a knife through Momota's hand and you threw Ouma through a damn door. Does absolutely none of this ring a bell?"

Maki shakes her head almost instinctively. She looks mortified. "I did?"

"Hoshi, I don't think there's any need to be so...curt," Kaede points out hesitantly. "Harukawa wasn't in control of herself, remember?"

"She wouldn't have gotten sick in the first place if she hadn't gone into Ouma's room," Ryoma points out with an irritated huff. He sounds more than done with the whole situation. He narrows his eyes at Maki. "I thought you planned to keep everyone safe?"

"I was-"

"Yet you risked everyone's safety to clean Ouma's whiteboards," Ryoma presses. "Why? I don't remember there being anything on them that seemed overly suspicious to me. If you wanted to clean them so badly then why couldn't you have waited until after Ouma was better to sort them out? There has to be a reason why you cleaned them."

Oh yeah, Kiibo (the one inside the simulation) had mentioned Maki had gone into Kokichi's room and cleaned the whiteboards. Kaito realises he hasn't really thought about this fact much, mostly because he doesn't really understand *why* Maki cleaned them. The whiteboards never stood out to him during the couple times he had been in Kokichi's room.

"Those whiteboards helped me during my game," Kaede murmurs quietly, as if voicing an afterthought. She flushes when Kaito looks at her. "Oh, don't mind me."

"I...I don't remember cleaning them," Maki suddenly says, gritting her teeth. "And I don't care about them either. I care about the fact you said I tried to kill Momota." Her expression turns desperate. "Did I really?"

It seems even Ryoma isn't cruel enough to continue being angry with her. Whilst the tennis player does still seem annoyed, instead of continuing to point out her mistakes, Ryoma sighs. "If it helps, you weren't as, how do I put this, *intense* when it came to Momota. You killed the Monokubs with no hesitation and..." Ryoma grimaces. "Hurt Ouma with no issue but when you had the chance to kill Momota..."

“You said I put a knife through his hand,” Maki murmurs. She snatches up Kaito’s hand and inspects it desperately, chewing her lip once she realises that his hand is fine now. “I...”

“Hey, I know you didn’t mean to,” Kaito reassures her. Honestly, he’s too overwhelmed with dealing with so many issues at once that he isn’t in the right state of mind to worry about one single thing too much. Besides, he knows that if Maki hadn’t been infected then she never would’ve hurt him in the first place. Her putting a knife through his hand was just an unfortunate mistake, that’s all.

He tries to grab her hand so he can comfort her but she suddenly walks away, running her hands through her hair as if she’s become suddenly stressed. He thinks about going against everyone’s advice of staying in the pod but when he tries to step out of it, Kaede puts a hand on his shoulder with a sympathetic smile.

“I really don’t think there’s much you can say to her that’ll help right now,” Kaede tells him regretfully. She licks her lips. “Besides, I...I think there are more pressing issues that need to be dealt with. I’m really not trying to rush you but...”

“Oh yeah, you mentioned that something’s going on,” Kaito murmurs. He wiggles his fingers. “Hey, can I come out now? I’m starting to get some feeling back in my legs so, you know, I don’t think I’ll end up on the floor like a pancake like Ouma if I step out.”

Kaito suppresses a snort as Kokichi, without lifting his head up, raises a middle finger that is clearly meant for him.

“Yeah, sure, I can help you out,” Kaede says as she offers Kaito her arm.

He declines it. “Don’t worry, Kaede! I’ll be fine on my own!”

“Uh huh, sure you will.” Kaede keeps her arm where it is as Kaito steps out. A second later, he grabs it as he realises how shaky his legs are. He laughs loudly as he stumbles and plays it off as if he meant to trip all along. “Yeah, you’re totally fine on your own.”

“Have a nice trip, Momota?” Kokichi calls from the floor, even though he still hasn’t lifted his head up. He must’ve heard Kaito trip. “You should send a postcard next time!”

Well someone is clearly feeling better. Kaito grumbles as he hooks one of his arms with Kaede’s and places his free hand onto his pod. He catches a glimpse of himself in the reflection of the glass and does a double take. Kaede’s smile turns into a grimace as Kaito leans closer, brows knitting together. “What the...”

Where the hell did his purple hair go?! Why is his hair *brown*? Also, whilst he’s complaining, he wishes he had some hair gel right now because he’s not sure what he thinks about his hair being down. He leans in closer and goes to run a hand through his brown hair when he stops. Oh. So not only is his hair brown but his eyes are too? Seriously, when the hell did all of this happen?! What dimension did he wake up in where he has brown hair, brown eyes and scars littering his body?

At least the faint constellation of freckles that are scattered around his upper face don’t look too bad. They make him look less of a thug. He thinks if he had a baseball bat to sling over his shoulder then he’d look the very definition of a delinquent.

“Kaito, are you okay?” Kaede asks quietly. She squeezes his arm gently.

Kaito pouts. “I look better with purple hair.”

He thanks whoever is around to listen that he still has his goatee.

Kaede looks a little stunned by his response before smiling warmly. “You’re certainly reacting better than I did. I almost cried when I saw my face.”

“Why? You look more than fine!” Kaito reassures her. “Your eyes are practically the same colour of Neptune, which is super cool.”

Kaede blinks before pumping her free fist. “I’ll take that as a compliment!”

“It is fucking weird that we look different though,” Kaito sighs. He looks over to Ryoma. “I mean, I almost didn’t recognise you there, Hoshi. Almost thought you were someone different for a moment. You look completely different without your trademark hat.”

Ryoma freezes and even Kaede stills as Kaito grins obliviously. The tennis player hesitates before asking, “do you remember me, Momota?”

“Remember you?” Kaito raises an eyebrow. “Dude, we’ve not met before but I totally know who you are! You were basically my childhood hero when I was growing up!” Ryoma turns his head to the side as Kaito continues. “Man, I can’t believe out of all the places I’d meet you it would be in an...” Kaito looks around. “Office like this. Once we get out of here we should totally play a game of tennis sometime! Younger me wouldn’t forgive me if I didn’t ask for a game!”

As Kaito babbles on, he completely misses how Ryoma’s shoulders slump and the look of pity on Kaede’s face. Once Kaito finally shuts up, he looks at Ryoma expectantly. Ryoma’s expression is hard to read and Kaito wonders what’s wrong with him. Ryoma ends up smiling, although Kaito can’t help but notice that there’s something bitter about it. “Yeah, we should.”

Satisfied with Ryoma’s response, Kaito turns to Kaede. “Now, what’s the issue that needs fixing? You’ve totally come to the right person for help! The Luminary of the Stars can fix anything!”

“Do you ever shut up?!” Tenko pokes her head from her pod and puffs out her cheeks. “You’re giving Tenko a headache with your constant talking! And she also wants to point out how rude you are! You didn’t even introduce yourself to Hoshi before asking him to play tennis with you!”

Kaito pulls a face. “W-Well he said my name so I just...assumed he knew me!” He grins as he rubs the back of his head bashfully. “Whoops, my bad man. I’m Kaito Momota, by the way, and I’m-”

“The Luminary of the Stars,” Ryoma finishes, causing Kaito to gape at him. Ryoma turns to the pod that Tenko is in. “Don’t worry, Chabashira. None of you have to worry about introductions. I’m well aware of who you all are.”

“Oh.” Tenko’s voice falls flat before she clears her throat. “Momota still should’ve introduced himself properly anyway.”

“Well I don’t see you introducing yourself!”

“That’s because Hoshi *just* said he knows who we are!” Tenko sneers, rolling her eyes. “Sheesh, keep up!”

Before Kaito can continue to bicker with her, Kaede guides him away from the pods with a small giggle. “Geez, I forgot how defensive you can be.”

“I’m not defensive,” Kaito mutters before looking around the office curiously. “Where are we

anyway? Out of all of the places I thought we'd end up in I didn't expect..."

A bland office filled with pods. Kaito looks around and wrinkles his nose. This place looks so boring and is an excellent reminder of why he would never accept an office job. He needs to be constantly on the go or he'll *die*. Well, maybe not die but still. He doubts he'd last more than five minutes in a room like this before spontaneously combusting.

"The thing is..." Kaede looks like she's about to dive off a cliff, which is extremely concerning since she's *not* and is instead about to fill him in on what's happening. She peers into a room Kaito didn't know even existed until now so he copies her. He's mildly surprised to see that there's someone inside of the room, someone with black hair and green eyes that are wide and surprised. "Ah, I really don't know how to tell you this."

"Momota?" The guy with black hair steps out of the room tentatively, like a spooked animal. Aw man, is this someone else who knows who Kaito is when he has no clue who they are?

Kaede's face turns more serious, her expression smoothing into something much more grave. "Momota, this is Saihara. He used to be..." Kaede clears her throat. "No, he *is* your sidekick. Your first sidekick, in fact."

"Sidekick, huh?" Kaito rubs his goatee as he looks Shuichi up and down. "Yeah, you certainly look like a sidekick."

"What's, ah, that supposed to mean?" Shuichi asks with a slight frown.

"Don't worry about it," Kaito tells him. He suddenly has the urge to clap his hand down onto Shuichi's shoulder and tell him that everything is going to be okay because man, this guy looks so fucking worried that Kaito himself can feel second-hand anxiety radiating from him.

Kaito then finally understands the implication behind Kaede's words.

"Hold on a second, Kaede. Are you telling me I have a bunch of sidekicks I don't remember?!"

Kaede looks like she's resisting the urge to slap her forehead. "That's not what's important right now!"

Well, actually it kind of is but with how intense Kaede looks, Kaito decides to not argue with her and mentally tells himself to find out how many sidekicks he has later on. Besides, he supposes with how urgent Kaede sounded earlier, he thinks there really *are* more important things that he should be focussing on right now.

"You!" Kaede says as she points to Kaito before turning her attention to Shuichi. "Need to tell him that not everything that is impossible can be made possible!"

Kaito blinks and wonders for a moment if he heard her right. She wants him to tell Shuichi that... the impossible is impossible? Well that's certainly an odd request, especially since she's asking him to view the world more negatively. What's wrong with being inspired? Kaito feels like he's missing something completely.

"Akamatsu..." Shuichi wrings his hands together and turns his head to the side, presumably so he doesn't have to look her in the eye. "I know what you're trying to do but--"

"He's trying to do something that is basically impossible," Kaede tells Kaito. There's something off about how she's all but tattling on Shuichi literally right in front of him. "And he needs to hear from someone like you that sometimes, even when you really, *really* want to accomplish

something, some things are just impossible to achieve.”

“Well that’s not a very positive outlook on life,” Kaito tells her, wincing as Kaede starts to glare at him. “What?”

Kaede looks at Shuichi with an undecipherable expression. “Are you going to tell him what you’ve been up to or am I?”

“I…” Shuichi swallows before sighing. “I want to keep trying, Akamatsu. Nothing is going to change my mind.”

Kaede’s lips thin and for a second, no one says anything. Kaito feels horribly uncomfortable as Kaede and Shuichi have a silent stare off. He’s about to crack some sort of joke when Kaede says, “Saihara has been keeping everyone in this office because he’s trying to put an end to Danganronpa.”

“Oh,” Kaito says, acting like he understands what Kaede just said. He doesn’t. “Um.”

Shuichi winces as Kaede opens her mouth once again. It looks like Kaede isn’t finished. “Which, by the way, is basically impossible since Danganronpa is loved by, how many people again? Millions? The entire *world*?”

“I told you that I’m getting somewhere,” Shuichi insists desperately, lowering his voice. “Akamatsu, what are you trying to prove? I don’t want to stop trying, especially not now.”

“Hey, uh, so what I’m hearing is that, um, Saihara, was it?” Kaito says as he points to Shuichi. “Is trying to put a stop to…Danganronpa, right?” He pauses as he thinks. Maki had told everyone what Danganronpa is when she first arrived in the simulation. He raises an eyebrow. “I’m struggling to see what the problem is. Isn’t putting an end to Danganronpa a *good* thing?”

“I mean, yeah, it *is*, ” Kaede says, sounding exasperated. “But did you not hear what I said about it being loved by the entire world? There’s no way that Danganronpa can be ended so easily. Another season is literally being prepared-”

“Wait, *another* killing game is being planned?!” Kaito feels his body tense up in alarm. “Then what the hell are we doing standing around for?! We gotta put a stop to-”

“*You’re not listening to me!*” Kaede stomps her foot on the ground as she balls her hands into fists. “Saihara has been trying to put a stop to Danganronpa for a while now and has made absolutely no progress-”

“I’ve made a little-”

“No you *haven’t!*” Kaede shakes her head adamantly. “Admit it, Team Danganronpa are only talking to you because they’ve got nothing else better to do! As soon as they find out that everyone is able to leave the simulation then-”

“Then we just won’t tell them!” Shuichi quickly responds, completely ignoring Kaede’s snort of disbelief. “As long as they think everyone is in the simulation, I can still negotiate with them! I…I haven’t given up yet, Akamatsu! I know I’m slowly getting to them. If we…if we all just stay here a little while longer then-”

Kaede shakes her head as she turns to Kaito. “You need to tell him that what he’s trying to accomplish is impossible. I’m…I’m not saying that you’re the problem but a couple of games ago you told him that the impossible can be made possible. Tell him that you weren’t actually being

serious.”

“I did?” Kaito blinks before pulling a face. “Kaede, are you *actually* sure that it’s completely impossible to end Danganronpa?”

“You...” Kaede closes her eyes as she takes a deep breath. “I asked for your help specifically to talk some sense into Saihara, *not* to encourage him! I know that you can sometimes get a little too ambiguous yourself but I’m telling you that taking on Danganronpa is the equivalent of taking on the world. It just can’t be done.”

“It can!” Shuichi argues, taking a step forward. He looks at Kaito as if he’s some sort of answer he’s been looking for. “Momota, you’re the one who told me that the impossible can be made possible. I’m trying my hardest to-”

“You’re destroying yourself,” Kaede snaps. Her eyes flicker over to the pods and she grimaces before biting down on her lip. It looks like she has something else to say but is hesitating. “And all of your friends are going to suffer if you keep this up. There’s already been two killing games that should’ve never happened. You can’t just keep everyone in the simulation for even longer. What if something bad happens? What if Shirogane snaps again and kickstarts yet another killing game?”

“Woah, woah, woah!” Kaito tries not to panic as he sees how watery Kaede’s eyes are. “Hey, don’t worry! As long as I’m around, nothing else bad is going to happen! Harukawa has already sorted Shirogane out so you don’t have to worry about her!” Kaito briefly wonders how Kaede even knows Tsumugi in the first place but doesn’t worry about this fact too much.

“I’m always going to worry!” Kaede retorts. Her bottom lip wobbles. “I’m...I’m scared. I’m scared that I’m going to have to watch my friends die again. I’m scared something is going to happen to Saihara if he keeps leaving the office. I’m...*scared*.”

“Hey...” Kaito rubs her shoulder carefully as Shuichi watches silently, chewing on his lip. Kaede is crying and Kaito hopes that no one thinks he’s the one who made her cry. “You don’t need to worry about all that shit. I don’t completely know what you’re on about but I’m sure we can figure something out, right? I can absolutely promise you that another killing game isn’t going to happen under my watch.”

“But what about Shirogane?” Kaede asks with a sniff. She rubs her eyes frantically.

“I’m not gonna let anyone die,” Kaito tells her. “So you don’t have to worry about that. As for Saihara, you said he’s my sidekick, right? If that’s the case then you don’t have to worry about him either because I trust all of my sidekicks, whether I remember them or not!”

Shuichi’s eyes light up whilst Kaede shakes her head bitterly. “Kaito, you don’t understand. What he’s doing is...is *stupid*-”

“I’m negotiating with Team Danganronpa about ending Danganronpa for good,” Shuichi explains. He licks his lips and nervously plays with his hands. “Whilst you’ve all been...trapped in the simulation, I’ve been talking to them frequently about retiring Danganronpa. They’re a little tricky to talk to but I think I’m definitely getting somewhere.”

Kaede looks like she thinks otherwise. “They’re just messing with you, Saihara.”

Shuichi ignores her. “Momota, all I need is just a little more time to talk to them. If I don’t end Danganronpa *now* then it’ll *never* end. This isn’t just a case of trying again later, either we end Danganronpa now or not at all.”

Oh man, his head is starting to hurt with all this brand new information. Kaito didn't think things would be so confusing outside of the game. He thought as soon as everyone leaves, that would be it. He didn't expect...all of this. He didn't expect Kaede and Shuichi to be arguing about ending Danganronpa.

Shuichi makes it sound like all that needs to be done is a simple negotiation and then that's it, bye bye Danganronpa. Kaede, however, makes Kaito think that things aren't as straightforward as that. She seems terrified. She seems to think if Shuichi continues to negotiate then something bad will happen.

There are so many unsolved mysteries that plague him too, the most prominent one being why he looks so different. However, if Kaito worries about things like that then he's only going to be wasting his time. He needs to be proactive, he needs to help as much as he can. He needs to save everyone.

"So what are you expecting me to say then?" Kaito asks Kaede. "If there's a chance to end these sick killing games then of course I want to do that, even if that means being a little reckless!"

Kaede looks startled by his words whilst Shuichi's entire face brightens.

"We can put a stop to the killing games!" Shuichi encourages him eagerly. "I knew you-"

"The only possible way for Saihara to keep negotiating is to keep up the guise that everyone is still in the simulation," Kaede says. "And we can't just bring everyone into the office and have them wait here since there's not enough space or supplies to keep everyone safe." She looks at Kaito sternly. "And having everyone stay in the simulation doesn't seem like the safest idea either. As long as Shirogane is around, there's always going to be a small chance that she'll try to force another killing game to happen."

"Ah, I see..." Kaito rubs his goatee thoughtfully. "But I've already said Shirogane is no longer going to be an issue so-"

"You seriously *also* want to end Danganronpa?" Kaede asks incredulously.

"Well *duh!*" Kaito answers as if Kaede has just pointed out the obvious. "I've got to admit that I'm struggling to see what your issue is. I mean sure, I'm pretty confident that there's a shit ton of stuff that you haven't filled me in on yet but the main thing is that you're all trying to put a stop to Danganronpa, right?"

"*Saihara* is," Kaede corrects him quietly. "And..."

It looks like she really, really wants to tell him something. Shuichi suddenly looks nervous as Kaede wavers. She looks at the pods sadly and then at Ryoma and Kokichi. They're both still on the floor.

"I just need a little more time," Shuichi says, almost sounding like he's pleading. There's this guilty look on his face that confuses Kaito. What has Shuichi got to be guilty about? "The, um, thing is I think it's for the best if, ah, well, you all stay in the simulation for just a little longer. Shirogane is no longer a threat and Monokuma isn't around to force another killing game. You'll all be safer in the pods rather than in the office since the pods will keep you healthy. There's...not enough supplies for everyone here."

"Instead of having everyone stay in the simulation, why not bring everyone out so they can negotiate too?" Kaito asks.

“Team Danganronpa wants this office vacated as soon as possible,” Shuichi tells him. “However, they can’t use the pods whilst they’re still in use and they’re currently under the presumption that, um, everyone is trapped in the simulation because of a glitch. If they know that everyone is able to not only leave the simulation when they want but are also out of the game, they’ll just break the door down and force us out of here.”

Kaito frowns. “So are they only willing to negotiate with you?”

“Pretty much,” Shuichi answers. He runs a thumb across his knuckles. “So, um, I really do think it’s for the best if everyone stays in the simulation until I’m done. Since Harukawa sorted Shirogane out, it’ll be safe for everyone to stay in there for the time being-”

“You can’t just expect everyone to stay put just because you want them to,” Kaede tells him sharply. “And after everything, don’t you think you’re asking for too much?”

“I...” Shuichi smiles bitterly. “Even so...”

“Then how about we ask everyone what *they* want to do?” Kaito suggests. “I’m sure if we explain the situation then everyone will be more than happy to wait around for a couple of days-”

“I think I’ll need more than a couple of days,” Shuichi murmurs.

Kaito decides that he didn’t hear that and remains positive. “I don’t know if I could live with myself if I ran away from all of this just to keep myself safe. Kaede, I get you’re worried but I promise I’m gonna do everything in my power to make sure that everything turns out okay, that’s a promise!”

Kaede looks at him silently and Kaito can practically see the gears in her brains whirring. For a second, Kaito thinks she’s going to argue with him and put her foot down but instead she sighs. “As...as long as a majority of people are okay with all of this then I suppose...” She rubs her forehead. “But I want Saihara to go back into the simulation and explain what’s going on to everyone himself. There’s still so much that needs to be said, even to you, Kaito.”

“Eh?! What else do I need to know?” Kaito groans. “Man, I feel like my head is going to explode if you fill it with more shit.”

“...I’ll go back in just for a little while,” Shuichi promises. “But I can’t stay in there for too long. I’m needed here.”

“I know that,” Kaede sighs. Kaito doesn’t like how defeated she looks.

“Then how about we go back inside already?” Kaito suggests. “Kaede you already told...uh, what’s his name again? Taro?”

“Rantaro,” Kaede corrects him quickly. “I told him to gather everyone in the gym since I thought that would be more convenient. I wasn’t going to keep everyone in the simulation for too long but...” She sighs again.

“Hey, have a little more faith!” Kaito tells her. He ruffles her hair, causing her to swat at his hand. “I’m confident that everything will turn out okay!”

Kaede’s smile is flat as she leads him back to the pods, Shuichi trailing behind them quietly. Ryoma looks up at them curiously as Kaede helps Kaito walk.

“What’s going on?” Ryoma asks.

“We’re going to ask everyone if they’re okay with staying in the simulation for a little while longer,” Kaede tells him.

Ryoma raises an eyebrow. “Really?”

“I’m sure everyone will be fine with hanging around for a couple days,” Kaito says. “I doubt that anyone wants another game of Danganronpa to occur so we should all do what needs to be done to give Saihara the chance to put a stop to Danganronpa once and for all!”

“Uh...” Ryoma pulls a face and turns to Kaede. “Does he know about the whole, you know, Saihara situation?”

“Eh, what do you mean?” Kaito asks curiously.

Kaede shakes her head frantically, her hair curtaining her face. “W-We...don’t need to talk about that right now.” Kaito can’t help but wonder what the hell she’s on about. She bites her lip. “So...”

Ryoma looks at her with an unreadable look on his face before turning his attention to Kaito. It looks like the tennis player is conflicted about something. Ryoma bites down on the inside of his mouth before sighing. “I suppose...that some things are better left unsaid. For now, at least.”

“Are you guys hiding something from me?” Kaito can’t help but ask, frowning as both Kaede and Ryoma avert their gazes. “Hey, is there something I should know?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Ryoma says and Kaito feels like the tennis player is using his own words against him. Ryoma peers past Kaito’s shoulder at Shuichi. “So you’re going to tell everyone about everything, huh?”

“It’s the least I can do,” Shuichi murmurs. He’s standing in front of a pod nervously, looking at the pod as if it’s suddenly going to spring to life and hurt him. Shuichi looks very...detached, as if he’s somewhere else completely. Is he that scared about going back into the simulation?

“Yeah, it is,” Kaede grumbles under her breath. She guides Kaito towards his pod but the astronaut shakes his head.

“Hold on just a second,” Kaito tells her. He starts to crouch slowly, his legs protesting as he lowers himself to the floor. Kaede mimics his movements, acting as his anchor. He positions himself near Ryoma and in front of Kokichi. “Hey, Ouma. You feeling any better?”

“Hmm?” Kokichi lifts his head up carefully and for the first time since arriving here, Kaito sees his face. He’s caught off guard by Kokichi’s honey brown eyes. Man, it’s going to take a while to adjust to the fact that everyone looks so different outside of the simulation. A crease grows between the smaller male’s brows and Kaito fights the urge to smooth it with his thumb.

“Momota?”

“Haha, yeah, that’s me,” Kaito says.

“...huh.” Kokichi blinks one more time before lowering his head back onto the floor. “Cool.”

“Don’t lie back down!” Kaito shakes his shoulder. “We’re all heading back into the simulation for a little while! You’re...good to stand, right? It’s probably for the best if we all head back in together.”

Kokichi groans tiredly and Kaito wonders if he’s going to continue to stay on the floor. Wow, he must be feeling *super* nauseous if he’s struggling to move. Kokichi places his palms flat against

the floor and tries to pick himself up using his arms. However, he barely lasts more than a couple of seconds before flopping back onto the floor.

“...seriously gonna be sick,” Kokichi murmurs.

Ryoma grabs a nearby waste bin and keeps it close. “It’s probably for the best if you don’t move for a little while longer, kid.”

“But...” Kaito suppresses a pout. Nah, he shouldn’t complain. He’s not cruel enough to make Kokichi move when he’s clearly struggling right now. He pats one of Kokichi’s shoulder blades with a sympathetic smile. “Nah, forget it. You stay here until you’re feeling better, got it?”

“On my own?” Kokichi asks, his voice muffled by the floor.

“I’ll be here,” Kiibo reassures him.

“Huh? Are you not going back in?” Kaito asks him. He then remembers how strange it is that Kiibo is here in the first place.

“I’ve been here all this time,” Kiibo says, pulling a face as Kaito looks at him incredulously. “It’s a long story but all that matters is I can stay behind and look after Ouma until he feels well enough to join you all.”

“Oh. Well, okay then.” Kaito pats Kokichi’s shoulder once more before standing up. As he stands, he sees Maki approach the pods apprehensively. She’s outright refusing to look him in the eye. It’s obvious that she overheard what’s going on as she heads straight to her own pod and steps inside without a word.

Kaito then realises he hasn’t seen Tenko this entire time. Her appearance surprises him as she pokes her head out from her pod. Her hair is brown but it’s much shorter than he remembers it being. It reminds Kaito of Kirumi’s hairstyle minus the side fringe. Tenko still has her usual fringe, although it’s on the longer side since it hasn’t been trimmed in a while. At least it doesn’t cover her piercing green eyes.

“Uh, what’s happening?” Tenko asks. “Are we...going back in?”

“Just for a little while,” Kaede reassures her. “It’ll be more convenient if we gather everyone in the same area so we can explain what’s going on.”

“Tch, ‘m gonna miss out on all the fun,” Kokichi grumbles from the floor. He sounds like he’s about to fall asleep.

Kaede grimaces. “Oh yeah. Ouma might miss out on everything if he doesn’t recover in time.”

“If that happens then I’ll tell him everything myself,” Kiibo reassures her. “I promise.”

“Then that settles everything!” Kaito says. He looks at Ryoma expectantly. “You’re coming too, right?”

“I...” Ryoma hesitates as he looks at Kokichi and then at Kiibo warily. “Maybe I should stay here just in case...”

“I promise that I’ll look at him,” Kiibo tells him fervently. “I don’t think it’ll give off a very good impression if you stay behind.”

Ryoma sighs, a conflicted look on his face as he stands up. "Suppose you're right..."

"Hey, you can leave as soon as we're done," Kaito points out. "And I trust Kiibo to look after Ouma! He did a super good job inside of the simulation!"

Kiibo looks pleased by Kaito's words and it seems Kaito's reassurance is enough for Ryoma to climb back into his own pod. As he does so, Kaede helps Kaito back into his. She looks nervous as he lies down flat.

"Kaito...are you sure about all of this?" Kaede asks as she helps make him comfortable.

"Well from the sounds of it, things are pretty straightforward, right?" Kaito says as Kaede pulls back. "Saihara just needs a little more time to put a stop to the killing games, yeah? I'm a little confused why Harukawa never just told us this inside of the simulation but I suppose with Shirogane causing problems with her motive, I guess it just slipped her mind."

Okay, Kaito will admit that there's something odd about the entire situation. He knows deep down that there's something that's being kept from him. He hopes it's nothing too serious. However, if he starts worrying about the smaller things then that means he won't be able to concentrate on the bigger picture. Making sure another killing game doesn't ever happen again is his main priority and he'll do all he can to support his sidekick with his goal to end Danganronpa.

He watches Shuichi step into his pod, his skin pale as he closes his glass door reluctantly. Man, Shuichi looks like he's seconds away from passing out. No wonder Kaito made him his sidekick several games ago, Shuichi looks like the sort of person who struggles if left alone.

"...yeah, it must've slipped her mind," Kaede murmurs. She goes to seal Kaito inside of the pod but he stops her by grabbing her wrist gently. "Kaito?"

"Something's bothering you," Kaito says softly. "You know you can talk to me about anything, right? If there's something you think I should know then lay it on me, I can take it."

Kaede looks at him silently and fails to completely hide the worry in her eyes. The smile she offers him looks fake. "I'm fine, Kaito. Thank you for worrying but..."

Kaito isn't sure if he's satisfied with her answer. "Hey, Kaede?"

"Yeah?"

"By any chance did I make you one of my sidekicks during a previous game?" Kaito asks.

Kaede blinks before nodding slowly. "Yeah, you did."

"Good." Kaito is pleased with her response. "Because if I hadn't then I'd definitely make you one now. Being my sidekick means your worries are now my worries so there's no need to look so distressed. I'm gonna make sure that everything turns out okay!"

Kaede's smile tightens and she quietly closes Kaito's pod door. Through the glass, Kaito sees Kaede's lips move and he swears she says, *"I don't think things are gonna be that easy."*

As everything goes dark, Kaito swears he's going to prove her wrong.

—

Kaito wakes up on the same stone floor as he did the first time. He sits up, groaning as he feels his

shoulders pop. This time around, he's not alone. To his side, he spots Maki with her back turned to him staring at the dormitory building. His jacket is bunched up tightly in her arms.

He's almost startled as he spots the Exisals standing by the dormitory. He then notices the remains of the Monokubs scattered around and remembers that they won't be able to pilot them anymore. Kaito winces as a piece of glass catches his eye. If he had woken up just a couple of inches to the side then he'd be lying on a pile of shattered glass right now.

Maki must hear him as he stands up as she briefly looks over her shoulder. To Kaito's dismay, Maki is wearing a purposefully blank expression, most likely so her true emotions don't betray her. She looks down at his jacket in her arms and thrusts it at him quickly.

"I woke up with this on," she tells him, all but forcing him to take it from her. "Here."

Kaito takes it from her without a word and slips it on appropriately, making sure that he's only wearing one sleeve. Ah, that's right. He had given her his jacket when he realised she was ill. He remembers how it splayed out behind her as she jumped from Exisal to Exisal, taking out the Monokubs one by one until they were all disposed of.

"Everyone is in the gym already," Maki tells him. Her attention has clearly been taken by the dormitory. She looks at the shattered door with a pained frown.

"Hey..." Kaito goes to put a hand on her shoulder but Maki dodges him with ease. Whether she dodged him subconsciously or on purpose, Kaito doesn't know. He clears his throat awkwardly. "Don't be too hard on yourself, okay? Things could've been worse."

"I put a *knife through your hand*," Maki hisses. "How could you say that things could've been worse?"

"Well you could've killed me," Kaito points out before wincing. Maki looks like she wants to be literally anywhere else. "B-But you didn't and that's the main thing--"

"I hope I didn't cause you too much pain," Maki says quietly. She studies his hands silently. Kaito starts to unravel the bandages that Kirumi had wrapped around the hand he used to punch the arcade machine and notices that there's not a scratch in sight. "Momota, I..."

"Hmm?"

"...how close was I to actually killing Ouma?" Maki asks, catching Kaito off guard. "Hoshi said I threw him through a door."

Yeah, she certainly did. Kaito looks at the glass that has been parted enough so that there's a safe path for people to use without hurting themselves. Kaito guesses that Kirumi must've made it.

Maki had dangled Kokichi in the air whilst checking for his pulse. Kokichi had been playing dead so well that even she wasn't completely sure if she had succeeded in killing him. Kaito finds it ironic that the only reason Kokichi had played dead was because he trusted Maki to not hurt him any further if she thought he was. Kaito wonders if Kokichi hadn't been infected with Despair Disease then would he have tried to perhaps reason with her? He thinks if Kokichi had done so then he would've been killed on the spot.

"You don't need to worry about that because you didn't kill him," Kaito answers. He doesn't want to think about what happened anymore. He doesn't want to remember how terrified he was, how convinced he was that he was going to die. He definitely doesn't want to remember the sound the door had made when Kokichi was thrown through it. He doesn't want to have to recall the sound of

glass shattering.

“Momota-”

“Just drop it, okay?” Kaito snaps. He recoils as soon as the words leave his mouth. Shit, what the hell is wrong with him?

Maki abruptly snaps her mouth shut and turns away from both him and the dormitory. “I...I’m going to head to the gym.”

“Harukawa, I didn’t mean to-”

“You should probably come too,” Maki says quietly. “The sooner Saihara can explain everything, the better.”

Kaito follows her helplessly. She doesn’t wait for him to catch up and because of how quickly she walks, Kaito struggles to walk alongside her. He spends most of the journey behind her. He’s within reach of her hand and he thinks if he reaches forward, he could probably grab it.

He doesn’t.

Maki holds the gym doors open long enough for Kaito to slip through but once he’s inside, she retreats to the back of the room, hiding in the shadows. He wants to pull her into the light and pretend that everything is okay but when he looks at her, Maki’s entire posture tenses. There’s something that frustrates him about her hiding from him. He didn’t think Maki could be so... cowardly.

He wants to talk to Maki but before he can even take a step towards her, someone taps on his shoulder. Kaito turns around and sees Kirumi peering at him. She looks incredibly worried.

“Are you okay, Momota?” Kaito can practically feel her gaze as she examines his body for injuries without touching him. “I wanted to help but I heard you tell everyone to stay in their bedrooms. I don’t see any injuries but I thought I heard you get attacked.”

Oh, she’s referring to Maki’s rampage. Kaito almost forgot that Kirumi probably has no clue what’s going on right now. She knows Maki attacked people in the dormitory and she probably knows that the wall has been fixed. After that, Kirumi is most likely clueless. Her hands are hovering helplessly. She probably thinks it’s a miracle that Kaito doesn’t even have a single scratch.

“I was told that if I left the simulation then all of my injuries would be healed,” Kaito tells her. He holds up his hands. “And it looks like Kaede was right.”

Kirumi pauses before her eyes light up with recognition. “Ah, you must be referring to Akamatsu.” She gestures towards a girl with blond hair and purple eyes. Kaito recognises her right away. “She said something similar. I wasn’t entirely sure if she was telling the truth since she did sound a little uncertain. I’m pleased to see that you’re okay.”

Kaito grins and sneaks a glance around the room. He sees that Rantaro must’ve rounded up everyone from the dormitory since the gym is currently full of people. His grin falters as he realises that Tsumugi isn’t in sight. “Hey, Tojo? Why isn’t Shirogane here?”

“She refused to come out of her room,” Kirumi tells him with a sigh. “She started to become too violent to deal with so we decided to just let her stay put for now. Whether that was a smart decision or not, well, we’ll just have to wait and see.”

“Tch, can’t believe she’s still causing problems even now,” Kaito grumbles. He pumps a fist. “She’s probably just sulking because she knows her dumb game is never going to happen. There’s no way she’s going to get her own way, especially now that one of my sidekicks has everything under control!”

“Is that so?” Kirumi sounds hopeful.

Kaito nods and looks around the room for Shuichi. His eyes land on a guy with hair that has a slight dark blue tinge to it. “Yeah, that’s him over there! He’s one of my many sidekicks!”

Kirumi waves at Shuichi politely. Shuichi seems momentarily startled before waving back meekly. Kaede is by his side and she’s staring at him intensely, obviously waiting for him to start talking.

“Momota, do you know where Ouma is? He’s the only other person who isn’t here,” Kirumi says.

“Ah. There’s a chance that he might not be here for a little while,” Kaito admits. “Leaving the simulation made him feel a little nauseous so he’s currently with…” Kaito trails off as he spots Kiibo talking to someone wearing a hot pink uniform. “What the…”

Kiibo looks oblivious as Kaito approaches him. “Hello, Momota! I’m glad to see that you’re okay!”

“I thought you were staying outside with Ouma?” Kaito asks, ignoring the huff from the girl who had been talking to Kiibo.

“Ex-fucking-cuse me, I was talking to him first,” the girl grumbles.

Kiibo tilts his head to the side, ignoring the girl’s foul language. “What do you mean? I…haven’t been outside of the simulation. After you all left, I helped Tojo clear the glass to the side so no one would hurt themselves on it.”

“Nah, no way man. You were definitely outside in the office,” Kaito says. “I even spoke to you!”

“Really?” Kiibo seems surprised by this fact.

“Oh the fucks sake,” the girl grumbles, rolling her eyes. “Before this conversation goes around in circles, let me fill you both in, well, in a completely vanilla way anyway.” She points to Kiibo. “There’s a prototype of you that exists outside of this game that has been hanging around in the office where everyone’s actual bodies currently are.”

“Oh.” Kiibo blinks. “Well that explains everything.”

“But how can he be in the simulation and outside of it at the same time?” Kaito asks.

“Because, dumbass, Kiibo is a little different to everyone and that’s not because he’s a robot,” she explains. “But I doubt your tiny mind will understand so instead of worrying about shit you’ll never understand, just accept that we basically now have two Kiibos to talk to.”

After bickering with her about how she doesn’t have to be so rude, Kaito ends up finding out that the girl’s name is Miu Iruma. She surprisingly helps him out by giving him the names of everyone else he doesn’t recognise, which includes a girl with red hair. She spends most of her time by Tenko’s side.

“Anyway, does anyone know what the fuck is going on?” Miu asks impatiently. She huffs once more as she puts a hand on her hip. “First Sushara reveals that he’s a complete asshole and now

we're all dawdling around in this shithole."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"By what, dumbass?"

"The first thing you said," Kaito says. "Firstly, it's Saihara. Secondly, what do you mean that he's a complete-"

"Everyone, can I have your attention please?"

Kaede is standing on the stage with a reluctant Shuichi by her side. She nudges him forward so that he isn't hidden by the shadows near the back of the stage. Whilst Kaede looks determined, Shuichi looks like he wants the ground to swallow him whole.

"Oh? I don't think I recognise you," Korekiyo murmurs to himself as he wanders closer to the stage, his eyes fixed on Kaede.

"Um, does someone want to tell Angie what's going on?" Angie asks. "Angie was sleeping when she was woken up by this horrible noise! Then Angie gets told that she has to wait in the gym! She's totally confused!"

Oh yeah, Kaito almost forgot that it's currently the early hours of the morning. Despite how late, well, *early* it is, Kaito finds that he's wide awake. Maybe the adrenaline of having to deal with Maki has left him on high alert.

Kaede pauses before clasping her hands together. "I actually had you all brought here so I, well, *we* can explain what's going on." She elbows Shuichi lightly. "For anyone who doesn't know, I'm Kaede Akamatsu and this is Shuichi Saihara."

"Are you both from outside simulation?" Gonta asks curiously. "Gonta doesn't think he has seen either of you before."

Kaede nods. "Yeah, that's right!"

"Did one of you fix the wall?" Korekiyo asks curiously. "I thought I was going to go blind when I first saw the light. It's rather bright."

"I fixed that thank you very much," Miu interrupts before Kaede can say anything. Kaede deflates as Miu continues. "So you can all get down on your hands and knees and thank me properly for my speedy work!"

"Speedy? Didn't it take you two days to fix the wall?" Angie points out.

Miu clicks her tongue. "Tch, ungrateful bitch."

"C'mon guys," Kaede sighs. She claps her hands together. "Focus! There's a lot of things that you all need to be told and the sooner we start, the better."

"Before you start, I would be grateful if you could answer my question first," Kirumi requests. Her expression is grim as she asks, "is Shirogane's motive still in play? She did say that we're working against a time limit."

Kaede seems more than pleased to answer her. "Of course her stupid motive is done with. No one has to worry about, you know, killing each other anymore. Her motive and her killing game are

finished for good.”

“Just like that?” Tenko gasps. She wipes her forehead. “What a relief! Tenko was starting to get seriously worried!”

“What I want to know is why we’ve been gathered in the gym,” Korekiyo says. “Since the exit is available, shouldn’t we be leaving instead of lingering around? Whilst Harukawa did take out the Monokubs, as long as Shirogane is around, a threat of another killing game occurring still looms over us.”

“What Shirogane wants doesn't fucking matter, none of us are gonna even listen to her anymore,” Kaito responds firmly, slamming his fists together. “I mean, we’re all on the same page, right?”

“The same page being that none of us want to commit murder?” Tenko raises an eyebrow. “Well duh.”

“Excuse me but we’re getting off track,” Korekiyo intervenes. He turns to Kaede with an inquisitive look in his eyes. “Why not tell everyone what’s going on outside of the simulation? I’m presuming that we’re all free to leave whenever we desire, correct?”

“That’s what I want to talk about,” Kaede tells him. She wets her lips with her tongue and turns to Shuichi. “What *we* want to talk about. I, um, I think there’s a lot that you all deserve to know, even though the truth about *why* we were all put in the simulation in the first place is rather daunting.”

“It sounds to Angie that you’re trying to stall,” Angie says. “C’mon, spit it out already! Angie is intrigued!”

Kaito catches Ryoma grimacing from the corner of his eye and something akin to dread pools in his stomach. Huh, why’s he pulling such a negative expression? Kaito knows that there’s still a lot he doesn’t know but surely he doesn’t have anything to worry about, right? Surely Kaede would’ve said something to Kaito earlier if there was something important he needed to know.

Kaede looks like she’s going to be sick as she wrings her hands. She looks to Shuichi for support a couple of times but every time she does, Shuichi either doesn’t notice or is purposefully ignoring her. With how out of it Shuichi looks, Kaito thinks it might be the former. Still though, what the hell is Shuichi doing? It’s almost as if he’s trying to do everything in his power to will himself away from the stage.

“Well, um, you see...” Kaede licks her lips once more and turns to Shuichi again. The look of desperation on her face almost causes Kaito to rush onto the stage and help her himself when Shuichi finally steps up. It seems that whilst he’s socially awkward, Shuichi isn’t the type to let someone squirm for too long.

“We’ll start off with something a little more easier to digest,” Shuichi says as he fumbles with his sleeves. His voice sounds steady but his body posture is a dead giveaway that he’s nervous. Hmm, looks like this guy could do with some encouragement later on. “I’m under the presumption that Harukawa has told you all what Danganronpa is, correct?”

“That’s the name of the game Shirogane wanted us to play, right?” Korekiyo answers, looking a little too pleased with himself when Shuichi nods. Korekiyo must pride himself on being a knowledgeable person.

“To put it simply, another game of Danganronpa is being planned outside of the simulation,” Shuichi reveals. There’s a scowl on his face that causes Kaito to shudder. Did he completely

misread Shuichi? He thought Shuichi was more on the timid side. The Shuichi he's looking at right now looks like he's prepared to take on the universe. "And I'm in the process of stopping another game from ever happening again."

"Uh..." Tenko lets out a drawn out noise of confusion.

"Another killing game is being planned?" Kirumi asks with a frown.

"Team Danganronpa have been manipulating vulnerable people for years," Shuichi says. "This isn't the first killing game that has happened and I'm not referring to the, um, glitch either." Shuichi looks away from the crowd before clearing his throat. Kaito can't help but notice how Kaede bites down hard on her lip. "We're all a part of the fifty third season of Danganronpa, meaning that there's been fifty three killing games in total."

"F-Fifty three?!" Gonta cries out incredulously. He starts to count on his hands with a panicked look on his face. "That's...that's too many killing games! Why has there been so many?! Not even *one* game should've happened!"

"Angie remembers Harukawa saying that people watch the killing games for entertainment," Angie points out. Despite everything, she still has a smile on her face, although whether it's real or not is unclear. "But Angie is struggling to figure out why there's even an audience for a game like this."

"The outside world you all think you know is...completely different," Kaede admits, inserting herself into the conversation. "It...it disgusts me to even say this but Danganronpa is a game that is loved worldwide. Millions of people not only love to watch it but also want to be a part of it too."

"I do recall Harukawa saying something about our memories being altered," Kirumi murmurs. Kaito hears her inhale sharply through her nose. "But I didn't think they had changed to this degree."

"Tenko is trying to remember signing up for Danganronpa but she can't," Tenko whimpers.

"Truth be told, the first time I heard of Danganronpa was when Harukawa told us about it," Korekiyo admits with a sniff. "I must admit I was rather reluctant to believe what Harukawa had to say due to how abnormal her claims were but now that two more people are backing up everything she has told us..."

Kaito glances over at the assassin from over his shoulder. Maki seems to have gained a sudden interest in her fingernails and ignores everyone's weighted stares.

"All of this could just be one big conspiracy though," Angie suddenly points out. Her claim causes Shuichi's jaw to twitch.

"You're wrong, everything that I'm saying..." Shuichi gestures towards Kaede. "What *we're* saying is nothing but the truth!"

"Then look Angie in the eyes and tell her why it has taken you all so long to tell us all of this," Angie says. Her eyes are piercing and her smile is pure ice. Her expression makes Kaito want to fall to his knees and confess all of his sins even though he's not her intended target.

"W-Well-"

"Angie's God is telling her you've had ample time to tell everyone about this yet it's taken several games for you all to finally protect us," Angie continues. "Angie saw on the arcade machine what

happened to her here once before. No one on Angie's island would've let her suffer as much as everyone outside of the simulation has."

"There were some, um, *complications*," Shuichi explains. He wipes his palms on his trouser legs. "It wasn't possible for anyone to come back in until now--"

"Liar," Angie hisses. "Harukawa joined days ago and made it very clear that the only reason we were all abandoned to suffer death after death is because none of you were brave enough to save us."

"S-Shirogane did break the exit for a little while though," Himiko timidly points out, recoiling as Angie directs her gaze onto her. The artist's lips thin and the ice in her eyes thaws ever so slightly.

"And *before* the exit was broken?" Angie presses. Whilst Kaito wouldn't say Angie looks smug as she's met with silence, it's all too clear that she's pleased that she's just proved her own point. "Whilst Angie's God encourages forgiveness, Angie doesn't think she wants to forgive the people who have done nothing but stand back and let the games continue."

Shuichi winces. "Angie, I understand you're angry but, um, you don't actually remember any of the previous games--"

Kaede elbows him hard as Angie's smile turns from slightly creepy to outright frightening. "We know you've all suffered and even though you don't exactly remember everything that you've all been through, you're right to be angry. I can't apologise enough for what you've all had to endure. It's just...none of us who managed to escape are lying when we say that even *thinking* about re-joining the simulation caused us to...to feel a fear so terrifying that re-joining just...just wasn't an option."

Tenko looks like she wants to run onto the stage and give Kaede a very long hug. "You must've been through a lot, Akamatsu."

"Not just me," Kaede says. Whilst Kaede looks uncomfortable, she continues. "Everyone here has gone through hell and it isn't fair to start comparing experiences. Suffering should never be made into a competition."

"We wouldn't have had to suffer if one of you fixed everything a lot sooner," Angie murmurs.

Miu huffs loudly. "Well no one better start saying I could've done more because I fixed the wall as fast as I fucking can. Do any of you know how hard it is to concentrate on fixing code with a damn migraine?" Miu pauses. "And none of you better go after my ride or die either. He literally jumped back into the simulation as soon as he could." She gestures to Ryoma, who lets out a sigh, although the corners of his lips do quirk up.

"Gonta doesn't think it would be fair to start pointing fingers," Gonta says. "He, um, thinks what everyone should be focussing on right now is ending Danganronpa! Saihara said he already working on that!"

"A-Ah, that's right," Shuichi says. The tips of his ears turn pink as everyone looks at him once more. The detective shies away from Angie's frosty sneer and picks up where he left off. "I've been negotiating with the people who run Danganronpa and have been trying to convince them to retire Danganronpa once and for all. I think I might be getting somewhere but..."

"Oh dear, this doesn't sound good," Korekiyo mumbles.

"The thing is, I'd really appreciate it if you could all cooperate with me for a little while. To put it

simply, it would be helpful if you all stayed inside of the simulation until I'm done negotiating," Shuichi says. His voice doesn't waver, even as he earns a couple of bewildered looks. "I understand that I'm asking a lot from you all but—"

"Wouldn't staying here be dangerous?" Kirumi asks. She looks apologetic about cutting Shuichi off but continues regardless. "I'm under the presumption that dying inside of the simulation causes your memories to be reset, correct? Whilst we no longer need to worry about another killing game happening for the time being, I'm not sure having everyone stay here is the wisest decision."

"I want everyone to stay here because I believe it's the safest place for everyone to be," Shuichi counters. "There aren't enough supplies for everyone outside of the simulation to keep everyone satisfied. The only place you would all have access to outside is an office and it's not exactly big enough for everyone to stay and be comfortable."

"Excuse me, are you saying that even if we leave, we're still technically trapped?" Korekiyo asks. He sounds a little more impatient than usual.

"The people I'm negotiating with are people none of you want to interact with," Shuichi says. He almost looks pained as he squeezes his eyes shut. "And if they knew that you're all able to leave the simulation whenever you want then they'll force us out of the office and I can't let that happen. As soon as they get access to the pods, they'll adjust them for the next season of Danganronpa."

"And why is it our responsibility to end this Danganronpa, hmm?" Angie clasps her hands behind her back. "From the sounds of it, ending Danganronpa is basically asking for a miracle so—"

"I think it is possible to end Danganronpa," Shuichi responds.

Something electric zips up Kaito's spine as Shuichi looks at him in particular. There's a mixture of desperation and determination blurring together in Shuichi's eyes.

"But why can't we just leave?" Angie stresses. "The people who run Danganronpa just want us out of the office, right? Can't we just leave? Like, you can do what you want. Angie doesn't care if you want to end Danganronpa. She just thinks it's silly that you're expecting everyone to feel the same way."

"If you leave the office, they'll turn you back into someone who loves killing games."

Every single person in the room seems startled by Shuichi's bombshell. Even Kaede, who Kaito had presumed knew everything, turns to Shuichi so quickly that her hair smacks her face.

"Saihara, you never told us that!" Kaede chews her thumb nervously.

"Kiibo said from the very start that Team Danganronpa are trying to find a way to revert everyone's memories back to their original state once they leave the game," Shuichi tells her. "Since they haven't, they have to do it manually. I've seen the flashback lights in a different office that they plan to use on us. It's basically a miracle that they haven't simply broken down the office door and used them."

"Wait, wait, wait, what do you mean that our memories are going to be reverted back into their original states?" Tenko asks. "Tenko knows that some of our memories have been altered but she just thought that she was missing some, not that they've been changed entirely!"

"The truth is..." Shuichi takes a deep breath and exhales slowly. "We're not actually people who belong in the real world. Our memories are tied to the Danganronpa world and since that's fictional, well, that makes us technically fictional too."

“...eh?” Gonta voices everyone’s exact same thought perfectly.

“You’re...you’re lying,” Angie insists.

“He’s telling the truth,” Ryoma says tiredly. Rantaro and Miu agree quietly whilst Himiko pulls on her hat helplessly. “I’ve seen all of the files that show our original selves and have even read some of the script of the original fifty third killing game. Can’t say I remember ever participating in it but there’s too much evidence to suggest otherwise.”

“Is that why I looked so different in the office?” Kaito asks.

Ryoma nods. “We were made to look different in the simulation so we’d look more exciting, I guess. I suppose since Danganronpa is fiction, no one questions why we have crazy hair colours. If anything, I think the reason why we all look so unique is to give us charm.”

“Tenko thinks she needs a moment,” Tenko murmurs as she leans heavily on the wall for balance. Himiko frets by her side.

“Chabashira, are you okay?” Kirumi quickly rushes to her side.

Kaito doesn’t mean to stand dumbfounded in the middle of the gym but truth be told, he’s rather caught off guard right now. It feels like there’s a damn supernova going off inside of his head. He likes to think that he’s smart but he’s struggling to wrap his head around this brand new revelation.

“What on earth are you on about?” Korekiyo asks. It seems he’s been the least affected by everything. There is, however, a fine layer of sweat building up on his forehead. “Are you implying that none of us should even exist?”

“I’m not implying, I’m telling you all,” Shuichi responds. “But that doesn’t mean we have to accept this truth though! We’re still people, whether Team Danganronpa thinks so or not. Our memories might be different but that doesn’t make us any less human than the rest of the world!”

“So hold on a second,” Tenko murmurs as she starts to massage her forehead. “We’ve been given memories that make us *hate* Danganronpa? How the heck does that even make any sense?”

“People don’t watch Danganronpa just to watch a bloodbath,” Shuichi says. “It’s about...putting people through as much suffering as possible. It’s about making people pick between hope and despair.”

“Ugh, *despair*.” Miu rolls her eyes heavily. “I’m *sick* of that fucking word.”

“Angie thinks it’s absolutely impossible that she’d sign up to not only have her memories altered but also put herself through hell,” Angie mutters darkly. “Her God thinks so too.”

“Well like it or not, you fucking did,” Miu huffs.

“Iruma, don’t be so blunt,” Ryoma sighs.

“Gonta just...really doesn’t like the idea of being fictional,” Gonta admits. He fiddles with the strap that’s attached to his bug box. “If Gonta not actually real then does that mean his family is fake too?”

Something about how Gonta asks this makes Kaito’s heart shudder. He feels tendrils of ice coil around his lungs and *squeeze*. He pictures his grandparents inside of their house that’s in the middle of the countryside. They’re his roots, the only two people he has left to call family. He has

memories upon memories involving them. They're the ones who raised him, who encouraged him to dream big. They're the ones who sat him down when he worried about not being able to achieve his dream of going to space.

He remembers how he asked his grandmother one night, "*what if it's impossible for me to go to space?*"

His grandmother's answer? "*The impossible is possible, Kaito. All you gotta do is make it so.*"

Like hell can he accept that those two people who built him into the person he is aren't actually real, that they're just a couple of phantoms designed to play a role in some fictional story.

He lifts his head up, ready to argue when he abruptly stops. He spots the sympathy in the eyes of everyone who has recently entered the simulation. There's no way any of them could be lying about them all being fictional.

So...where does that leave Kaito then?

To his side, he hears someone crying. He thinks it might be Tenko. Somewhere else, he sees someone run their hands through their hair sporadically. Behind him, he feels the weight of Maki staring at him expectantly, almost as if waiting for him to say something that'll fix everything.

As Kaito stands in a room that is slowly being suffocated with misery, he realises that what everyone needs right now is someone who can make everything better. A hero. Someone to guide them all through this surprising turn of events.

A real hero wouldn't let something like this stop them.

The laugh Kaito lets out is loud and startles more than half the room. "C'mon guys, you're all not seriously gonna let something like this put you down, right?"

"Huh?" Gonta blinks wildly. "Momota...not worried?"

"What have I got to be worried about?" Kaito tells him and knocks his knuckles together. "Who fucking cares how we became the people we are? If I want to be the Luminary of the Stars then that's who I'll be!"

"But everything Tenko knows is just a lie," Tenko murmurs. "She doesn't think she can just accept that..."

"Yeah, it's fucked up that our heads have been stuffed with a bunch of lies but if we all start worrying about things that we can't control, we're never going to be able to change the things we can," Kaito says. "And I don't know about you guys but I'm even *more* determined to make sure no one has to go through the same shit we've been through! A game like this should not exist!"

"...what do you mean that we should just stop worrying?" Korekiyo asks. His hands tremble as he hugs himself tightly. "My sister...my memories of her are far too precious to accept that they're fake."

Kaede flinches on top of the stage whilst Kirumi tries to comfort Korekiyo the best she can. "Shinguji, perhaps you should sit down so you can properly process-"

"Excuse me, I don't think I want to be here right now," Korekiyo says as he shrugs off Kirumi's hand. His departure is so quick and unexpected that no one stops him.

“Maybe we should’ve sat everyone down before revealing the truth,” Shuichi mumbles to himself. Kaede looks like she agrees.

Kaito isn’t sure if it’s pure desperation fuelling him or if he’s managed to fool himself into thinking that everything will be okay as long as he thinks so. Since quite a few people already knew everyone is fictional, there’s only a couple of people who seem to be struggling right now.

Tenko looks like she’s seconds away from spiralling but every time she snuffles, Himiko squeezes her arm. Kirumi looks dazed but that’s about it. It makes Kaito wonder if she’s acting purposefully neutral or if she’s hiding how she feels. Korekiyo is obviously having a bad time since he left the gym altogether and Kiibo looks like he’s seconds away from shutting down. At least Miu’s distracting him by talking his ear off. Gonta simply looks up at the ceiling, his beloved bug box clutched tightly in his hands.

Angie’s expression is the most baffling. Despite everything, she’s smiling.

Kaito would be more pleased if it wasn’t so obvious that her smile is painfully fake.

“So Saihara is telling Angie that not only does the world love killing games but there’s people outside who want to change Angie?” Angie asks. “That...that Angie isn’t actually real?”

“I’m really sorry,” Shuichi answers. He truly does sound apologetic. *Guilty*, even.

“...Angie needs to do something,” Angie murmurs and dashes out of the room.

“Yonaga, please wait!” Kirumi calls out after her, sighing as the artist ignores her.

“Well this is turning into one big shit show,” Miu grumbles. She narrows her eyes and pouts. “And why the fuck is everyone conveniently not mentioning what Sushara told us before? He’s got some fucking nerve asking us all to stay here after what he’s done.”

“Eh?” Kaito raises a brow.

“Um...” Shuichi turns pale and his confidence seems to fade away.

“For now, that doesn’t matter,” Kaede suddenly says, which disappoints Kaito since he’s kind of curious about what Miu said. Kaito’s brow raises even higher as he notices Shuichi’s shoulders slump, relief evident on his face. Kaede’s eyes flicker over to Kaito for a second and all he can see on her face is guilt. “T-There are more important things we should be talking about right now.”

Huh, are the survivors hiding something? Kaito watches as Miu frowns and Ryoma’s lips thin. Rantaro fiddles with one of his many rings whilst Himiko chews on her lip so hard she draws blood.

Miu seems annoyed but a stern look from Ryoma causes her to be quiet. It seems that Ryoma and Kaede must be on some sort of same wavelength. Are they both protecting Shuichi? Or is it someone else they’re protecting?

“Even though...” Shuichi clears his throat. “Even though not everyone is present, I’d like to once again ask you all to stay here for the time being. I cannot stress enough how delicate this entire situation is. One wrong move and everything will be ruined.”

“You want us all to stay here so you have a better shot at ending Danganronpa, correct?” Kirumi summarises. She tucks a loose strand of hair behind her ear, looking like the very definition of elegance.

Shuichi nods. "I...I need to end it as soon as possible. I don't think I can put into words how much I despise Danganronpa. You all feel the same way, right?"

"Of course we do!" Kaito agrees. "So if all you need is a couple more days to negotiate then-"

"It might take longer than a couple of days," Shuichi admits hesitantly. "I am asking for a lot from Team Danganronpa, including the safety of your memories."

"You're trying to keep our memories safe?" Ryoma seems surprised by this and the scowl he's been wearing the entire time softens.

"Perhaps I've been a little greedy asking for our memories to be kept intact as well as for the end of Danganronpa but...I like who I am," Shuichi says. "I don't want to turn back into someone who enjoys killing games. After surviving one and watching a couple of others...I'm struggling to figure out why people find them so appealing."

"Don't you worry about things like that, sidekick," Kaito tells him. "You concentrate on kicking Danganronpa's ass, got it?"

"Is that your way of saying you think we should stay here?" Himiko asks.

Kaito nods. "It'll just piss me off if another season happens. If my sidekick thinks he has everything under control then I believe in him!" He pumps his fists. "But just remember, Shuichi, you're my sidekick. If you think you're struggling then you come to me, got it?"

"Shuichi?" Shuichi murmurs before smiling. "Ah, yeah, I got it."

"That applies to all of my other sidekicks too!" Kaito declares. "Even though I might not remember making some of you into my sidekicks, that doesn't mean I haven't stopped caring about a single one of you! In fact, I'd like to make it perfectly clear that from now on, everyone's worries are now my worries. If we're gonna get through this together as a team then none of you have time to waste on worrying about things out of your control."

That's right, he just needs to take control of the situation and not let anyone's weakness hinder them. Things are going to be rough from now on but as long as there's a hero around, everything should be okay.

As long as he's got enough distractions to keep himself sane, everything will be fine.

"I simply don't understand how all of this is possible," Kirumi murmurs, more so to herself. "I didn't think there was such technology that existed that could cause our memories to be replaced altogether."

"Nyeh, you can thank the flashback lights for that," Himiko says. "The simulation can change memories automatically but the flashback lights can change them manually. At least, that's what I think anyway."

"How are flashback lights even made anyway?" Rantaro ponders out loud.

"There's a flashback light making machine upstairs in one of the classrooms," Himiko answers. "I've seen it with my own two eyes."

"Ah, I don't think I've ever seen it before," Kaede admits.

"Shirogane used it a lot in the original game to create some sort of story about the outside world

being different,” Himiko says. “I remember looking at it with Saihara. It was really strange because there were all these different options about which memories were available to insert into a flashback light.” Himiko pouts. “It was super weird.”

“I thought flashback lights only existed inside of the simulation,” Shuichi murmurs. “It surprised me when I saw that they existed outside too. It really *is* scary how far along technology has come.”

“Well it doesn’t surprise me,” Miu says. “If Team Danganronpa can make a simulation as complicated as this, of course they’re capable of being able to make something that changes memories using light. Although I’ve gotta admit, this flashback light machine sounds interesting as fuck. Where is it again?”

“In one of the classrooms upstairs,” Himiko says. “It’s kind of hidden but I know how to find it.”

It looks like Miu is already planning how she wants to spend her time in the simulation. Kaito wonders if he should start doing the same. After all, it looks like everyone will be staying here for quite some time.

He watches as Shuichi and Kaede leave the stage, both of them realising that everyone is far too distracted to listen to anything else. He can’t lie, it feels like his heart is trying to hammer its way out of his chest. Is he stupid for soldiering on despite everything? He can tell morale is low. Everyone looks devastated in their own unique way.

It’s not everyday you find out you’re actually a fictional character and everything you think you know is a lie. It’s nauseating. It’s terrifying. It’s like being forced to face the unknown alone.

Kaito has never been the type to sit around and mope though. So what if he’s been dealt some shitty cards? He can’t let his sidekick do all of the work. If Shuichi is going to try his best to end Danganronpa then Kaito is going to try his best *and more* to keep morale up.

...if he believes that everything will turn out okay then...

...everything will be okay.

—

Kaito leaves the gym to get some fresh air. As the gym doors close behind him, Kaede drags Shuichi around so that they can talk to different people. Whilst Shuichi seems eager to leave, Kaede has a firm grip on his arm that forces him to follow her.

Even the stars don’t comfort him as Kaito steps outside, wiping sweat from his forehead. He’s the sort of guy who sweats when he’s nervous, although he isn’t warm enough to take his jacket off. Hell no. His jacket is staying firmly on because even though he would never admit it out loud, he finds the weight of the starry fabric soothing.

He spots Angie by the dormitory, circling the yellow Exisal quietly. She seems too nervous to touch it, although with how intensely she’s staring at it, it’s clear that she’s intrigued by it.

Her reaction to everything was kind of bizarre in Kaito’s opinion. It was like she didn’t want to trust anything Shuichi or Kaede had to say at first. Then, when the truth was too overwhelming to ignore, she retreated behind her icy smile.

Angie must end up noticing him as she suddenly waves him over, pointing at the Exisal with wide eyes. “Ah, just the person Angie wanted to see!”

“Huh?” Kaito blinks. “You wanted to see me?”

Angie nods. “You told Angie that you’d teach her how to use an Exisal, remember? Angie thinks *now* is the best time for you to do that!”

Kaito falters and rubs the back of his head, eyeing the Exisals apprehensively. “I suppose I did say that.”

“Great! Then let’s-”

“But is now really the right time?” Kaito asks. “I like your ambition but...the Exisals are dangerous, Angie. They’re not toys.”

Angie huffs impatiently. “Yes, Angie knows that they’re not toys. Angie isn’t dumb.”

Kaito sighs. “Look, when a man makes a promise, he always fulfils it. It’s just...”

“You weren’t lying when you said you’d teach Angie, right?” Angie asks. Her smile twitches ever so slightly. “Because Angie doesn’t like it when people lie to her and Angie’s God isn’t in a very forgiving mood at the moment.”

“Well firstly, I think you’re too small to actually pilot an Exisal without exhausting yourself,” Kaito tells her. “Secondly, why do you even want to use one in the first place? They’re dangerous to be around. As cool as they are, it would be a smart idea to either put them away or destroy them altogether.”

“So you did lie to Angie,” Angie grumbles. She skips to the opposite side of the Exisal, hiding herself. “That’s disappointing but if Kaito promises to not lie to Angie again and teaches her how to use the Exisal then she’ll think about not cursing you for a hundred years.”

Kaito shudders but wills himself to not argue with her. “Angie, I’m telling you as someone who has worked with these sorts of machines before, they’re difficult for someone your size to use.” He massages his forehead. “Look, don’t be so awkward, okay? It’s been a really long day so-”

Angie ignores him as she starts to climb up the Exisal. Due to her being hidden by it, Kaito only notices that she’s inside of it once she’s actually sitting down comfortably. His patience frays and his heart rate skyrockets as she wraps her hands around a pair of levers.

“Angie, *what are you doing?!*” Kaito tries to climb into the Exisal to stop her but halts as the Exisal takes a jerky step forward. Angie huffs as she pushes one of the levers slowly. As Kaito predicted, she isn’t strong enough to manoeuvre the Exisal effectively. “Stop that, you don’t know what you’re doing!”

“It’s just like the arcade machine, right?” Angie says as she jerks the levers around. The Exisal hatch suddenly snaps shut as she accidentally catches something with her elbow. “Oh!”

“Angie, seriously, quit screwing around before you hurt yourself!” Kaito takes a step back as Angie moves the Exisal again, this time making the arms swing around wildly. Kaito barely manages to duck in time as one of the arms hurtles towards him. “Angie!”

What is her problem?! Kaito is well aware that the Exisals are equipped with guns and since Angie is apparently pressing down on things at random, she’s going to end up causing some actual damage if she keeps this up. Kaito takes several steps back as the Exisal starts to move again. He briefly thinks about hopping into one himself to try and stop Angie but she must figure out how to run because she’s suddenly off like a rocket.

Kaito chases after her, almost tripping over his feet as he follows her down the stone steps. The Exisal sways as it almost falls on the bottom step but by some miracle it stays upright. Kaito hopes Angie has at least strapped herself in properly. She could cause herself a serious head injury if she jolts around too much and smacks her head off something.

The Exisal awkwardly stumbles towards the light and Kaito feels a confused frown grow on his face. Where exactly is Angie taking the Exisal? Kaito continues to follow her all the way down the stone path, impressed that she's even managed to get this far. However, one quick glance over his shoulder reveals how broken the stone path is due to Angie's poor coordination.

He leans back as the Exisal teeters to the side before quickly regaining balance. Kaito feels a spike of panic every time the Exisal moves a little too quickly. He almost cries tears of relief when Angie eventually stops the Exisal in front of the hole in the wall, blocking it with the Exisal.

"Angie! What the hell do you think you're playing at?! You seriously could've hurt yourself, you know!"

"But Angie didn't!" Angie calls out from inside the Exisal. "Um, how does Angie open the hatch?"

Kaito sighs impatiently. "Don't fucking touch anything. I'll open it. There *should* be a lever on the outside in case of emergencies."

He's right. There's a lever hidden at the bottom of the Exisal that Kaito finds rather quickly. Instead of being impressed with his speedy discovery, Kaito instead looks up at Angie with an exasperated huff. She looks down at him with flushed cheeks. She has clearly exhausted herself and Kaito isn't surprised. Pushing and pulling levers can be exhausting work for someone who isn't experienced with piloting machines.

"What the hell is your problem?" Kaito tugs on his jacket as it starts to slip down his arm. "Did you not listen to a damn thing that was said in the gym? If you die, you're gonna lose your memories again-"

"Well Angie didn't die so stop being so dramatic," Angie says. She blows a couple of sticky strands of hair from her forehead. "If Kaito had just done as he promised then Angie wouldn't have had to take the Exisal like that!"

"Why do you even want the fucking Exisal anyway?" Kaito sighs. "And why are you blocking the exit? No one can leave with the Exisal in the way."

"Good," Angie says with a sniff. "Because Angie has decided that no one is allowed to leave."

"*What?!*"

"Angie has thought things through and after what she's been told, she thinks going outside would be stupid," Angie tells him. "Her God says it would be much safer to stay here and turn this school into our home-"

"I don't want to fucking stay here forever!" Kaito retorts. "And you need to move so Saihara can leave! You can't just decide to block the exit just because you want to!"

"Angie thinks Kaito needs to calm down," Angie says. "And he should be grateful that Angie is going to let him stay here even though he's yelling at her."

Kaito shakes his head in disbelief. "You can't be pissed off one moment for being trapped here and then suddenly decide to block off the exit! I thought you wanted to leave just like everyone else?!"

Angie sniffs. “Angie’s God has told her that it’s safer here than it is outside. Angie doesn’t want to live in a world that causes suffering for entertainment. We don’t have a place outside so why not turn the school into a paradise for us all to enjoy?”

Man, for someone who was so insistent that Shuichi and Kaede were lying, Angie really has taken their words to heart. Maybe Angie is more insecure than she lets on? Still, that doesn’t give her the right to keep everyone trapped.

“Don’t be so immature,” Kaito says. “You know that’s not possible-”

“Well what if Angie believes it’s possible, hmm? You always go on about how if you believe hard enough then anything is possible,” Angie counters.

“You’re twisting my words,” Kaito responds with a scowl. “Like *hell* would I force people to do shit they don’t want to do just to get my own way. Sure, sometimes you’ve gotta be a little reckless to get what you want but this?” He gestures towards the Exisal. “This is too far.”

“You’ll thank Angie for this one day,” Angie tells him. “Kaito isn’t thinking straight because he’s been made to think Saihara can fix everything but after what Angie has heard, she thinks staying here is our best option-”

“No it fucking isn’t-”

“Momota, Angie? What’s going on?”

Ryoma approaches Kaito with a raised brow, his hands tucked deep in his pockets. He cranes his head up to get a better look at Angie.

“You do realise you’re blocking the exit, right?” Ryoma says.

Angie purses her lips. “Yes, Angie is aware.”

“...well shit,” Ryoma mutters.

“She needs to move so Saihara can leave!” Kaito’s voice starts to get louder and louder. “Angie, get out of the Exisal!”

“No!” Angie closes the hatch up once more and Kaito makes a strangled noise. He pulls on the lever to open it back up but Angie must be pressing down on something, causing Kaito’s tugs to be in vain.

“Didn’t expect to walk out and see this,” Ryoma admits as Kaito fights with the lever.

“She’s being unreasonable!” Kaito grits his teeth as he pulls just a little harder. He almost trips as his hands become too sweaty for him to continue. He wipes them furiously on his trousers. “Doesn’t she want to end Danganronpa?!”

Ryoma pauses. “You can’t force her to go along with Saihara’s plan if she doesn’t want to.”

“I-I know that! I would never dream of forcing anyone here to do something if they didn’t want to,” Kaito responds quickly. “But she can’t just block the exit off either!”

“...Angie, you sure you can’t move for even just a second?” Ryoma asks. “I wanted to check on Ouma since he’s still outside. I’m starting to regret leaving him. He should’ve logged in ages ago.”

“He can join us when he’s ready” Angie answers. “But Angie has already decided that leaving isn’t

an option so-”

“A-Angie?!”

It seems that everyone is slowly starting to trickle from the gym. Kaito isn't too surprised to see that Shuichi has decided to make a beeline for the exit. The detective tries to approach the Exisal but it suddenly springs to life.

“Momota, what's going on?” Shuichi asks frantically.

Before Kaito can answer, Angie beats him to it. “Since the outside world is so horrible, Angie has decided that we're safer here so-”

“Angie, I *need* to be outside,” Shuichi says. He almost sounds like he's pleading. “I'm being serious, it'll become a huge problem if I can't leave-”

“Saihara should be thanking Angie for saving him!” Angie huffs. “He should've realised by now that taking on the entire world is silly. He should be grateful that Angie is even letting him stay. Even though she thinks Saihara is super suspicious, he's welcome to stay as long as he apologises for failing to help everyone sooner.”

Shuichi flinches. “So...if I don't apologise then will you let me leave?”

Ryoma shakes his head, muttering a quiet, “*unbelievable*,” under his breath.

Angie doesn't sound pleased with his response. “Angie thinks Saihara has completely lost his way.”

“S-Still, blocking the exit is rather extreme,” Kaito says. “C'mon, Angie. If you want to stay here for a little longer then that's fine. At least let the people who want to leave get out.”

“Angie's decision is final,” Angie tells him. The Exisal remains still.

“She's...not being serious, right?” Shuichi's attention shifts to the hole that is being blocked by the Exisal, desperation evident in his eyes. “Momota, what happened?”

“She just took the Exisal and bolted,” Kaito explains rather weakly. He eyes the Exisal warily. One wrong press of a button and things could easily go from zero to a hundred in a matter of seconds.

“I really don't have time for this,” Shuichi murmurs. He runs a shaky hand through his hair. “They told me that they wanted to talk again tomorrow. If I'm not out in time then they're gonna know that something is up and-”

“Hey, hey, hey, calm down.” Kaito squeezes Shuichi's shoulder tightly, hoping that the extra weight will ground him. “Just...relax, okay?” He lowers his voice. “Angie can't stay in the Exisal forever. The moment she moves, I'll move the Exisal myself, got it?”

“What's going on?”

Kaito has a feeling he's going to be hearing that question a lot tonight.

It seems that even more people have noticed the disappearance of the yellow Exisal. Kaito watches as Maki, Kirumi, Tenko and Himiko approach with varying looks on their faces.

“Angie has blocked the exit,” Ryoma responds bluntly.

“Sounds like something she would do,” Maki sighs. She frowns as she notices the panicked look on Shuichi’s face and flexes her hands. “I can move her.”

“Woah, just hold on a second!” Kaito really doesn’t like how serious Maki looks. He’s seen what she’s capable of and...

He trusts that what happened when she was sick was just a one off, of course he does! It’s just, looking at her expression right now makes his lungs tighten uncomfortably and his skin crawl. He has to remind himself over and over that Maki is on his side. He doesn’t like that he has to do this.

“Angie,” Maki says as she approaches the Exisal dauntlessly. “Move before I move you myself.”

“Even *you* can’t move the Exisal,” Angie responds and Kaito has to commend Angie for her ability to sound relaxed despite everything.

“Who said I was moving the Exisal?” Maki reaches for the lever. “I’d rather not use force but you’re really testing my patience.”

Maki doesn’t even manage to lay a finger on the lever before a hand wraps around her wrist. Kaito would find the surprised look on Maki’s face almost comical if the situation was any different. Even he’s stunned as Kirumi holds onto Maki’s wrist tightly.

“Tojo?! What are you doing?” Seriously, what *is* she doing?

“Let go,” Maki demands. Her hand is balled into a fist.

“Not until you confirm that you won’t lay a finger on Angie,” Kirumi responds.

“Hold on! You didn’t think that Harukawa was gonna hurt Angie, right?” Kaito asks incredulously. “I thought you trusted her?!”

“I made it very clear from the start I’d treat Harukawa as a threat if she ever acted as one,” Kirumi answers calmly.

But Maki isn’t being...

Kaito swallows as the last couple of seconds finally catch up to him.

Oh.

“S-She would never hurt Angie!” Himiko intervenes as she latches herself onto Kirumi’s free arm. Maki looks surprised that Himiko is defending her. “She just...used the wrong words.”

Kirumi silently chalks up her options. After a couple of seconds, she lets go of Maki’s wrist. Kirumi, however, also doesn’t move. “It’s been a long day. It’s late and it’s understandable that everyone is currently feeling rather emotional. It’ll be in everyone’s best interest to perhaps get some rest and-”

“I don’t have time to rest!” Shuichi puts a hand to his chest. “I need to leave!”

“Do you need to negotiate tonight?”

“Huh?”

“I asked if you’re required to negotiate tonight,” Kirumi says. “Because if not, there will be no consequences if you stay here for just one night.”

“But...”

“I assure you that you’re only wasting your time if you continue to argue,” Kirumi tells him. She clasps her hands down by her waist and clears her throat. “Everyone has been through a lot today and I think it’s for the best if you all get some rest.”

“But what about Angie?” Shuichi asks. “She can’t just keep the exit blocked!”

“Angie can!” Angie sings from inside the Exisal.

Kirumi grimaces but doesn’t back down. “I’ll talk to Angie. Everyone else should get some rest.”

Shuichi looks like he wants to argue but when a sudden wave of exhaustion hits Kaito like a ton of bricks, he decides to steer Shuichi away from the exit himself. “C’mon, sidekick. It’s been a long day. Surely you must be itching for some sleep, right?”

“I-I don’t need sleep, I need..” Shuichi trails off as Kaito yawns loudly.

The astronaut doesn’t exactly like to resort to pushing people around, especially when he can encourage them instead. However, it’s starting to become all too clear that arguing with Shuichi is like arguing with a brick wall. Everything goes through one ear and out of the other. So as Kirumi turns to the Exisal patiently, Kaito keeps a heavy hand on Shuichi’s shoulder and walks him to the dormitory himself.

Kaito is glad that Shuichi’s back is turned, otherwise he’d see the deep frown on Kaito’s face.

—

“Ouma, you haven’t said anything for a while now. Are you...”

Kiibo wrings his hands as Kokichi continues to ignore him. Kokichi turns the page of the script that he’s reading, eyes transfixed on every line. He devours each word hungrily, as if he’s starving for information. His hunger blinds him from everything, including the mess of files around him.

He’s sitting in the middle of an avalanche of paper, photographs and folders. He has the monitors on full volume but every word is ignored unless something catches his attention. Kokichi turns yet another page, his eyes zigzagging at a dizzying speed as he consumes every detail.

The bottle of water that Kiibo had placed by his lap earlier remains untouched. The only thing Kokichi has accepted from the robot so far is information.

Kokichi knew he was never going to make it to the gym in time so despite dealing with the worst sickly nausea he’d ever felt in his life, he had instructed Kiibo to fill him in on everything himself. When Kiibo had told him about being able to listen to Kaede and Shuichi from the monitor room, Kokichi all but demanded for Kiibo to take him there.

See, Kokichi isn’t the sort of person who takes things at face value. The moment the word *fiction* started to be thrown around, Kokichi commanded Kiibo to bring him every single file that he deemed relevant regarding Danganronpa. He had asked him for the files demandingly. Desperately. He has read through every file available and despite Kiibo mumbling something about privacy, Kokichi has also torn through everything that didn’t even include himself just in case.

Distantly, he hears the tick, tick, ticking of a clock that must be out of sight. Kokichi turns yet another page.

His file was a joke. The majority of the other files he had read included a page about each character everyone apparently is. Kokichi's file did not include this page.

It didn't bring him any relief when he found that Kaito's page had been torn in half and that the bottom half is missing altogether.

He did find a mountain of ripped up paper in the bin under the desk but he hasn't become that desperate. Yet.

Kokichi pretends his fingers aren't trembling as he starts a new page. His head is pounding, his mouth is dry and his heart is racing. His face is blank.

"Ouma," Kiiibo tries again.

Truthfully, Kokichi doesn't even hear him as he becomes engrossed in his search for answers. Nothing else matters until Kokichi finds what he's looking for.

(He doesn't even know what he's looking for.)

He won't be satisfied until he's read everything that's on offer page by page.

Line.

By.

Line.

Final Loop - Chapter 2 Part 2

Chapter Notes

I just wanted to say I'm super sorry for the two month wait. I didn't intend to take so long to write this chapter. Admittedly, once I realised how much I wanted to cover in this loop I was like aaaaa, I think I need to take a step back and do some planningahaha. I also wanted to really take my time on this chapter because I was starting to worry that the last couple of chapters haven't exactly been up to standard, specifically every chapter belonging to Kaito's loop. After rereading through everything I think I've been worrying over nothing but I must admit there is always a bit of a struggle when I have to change protagonists and for me personally Kaito is a tricky guy to write. However, I'm feeling good about this chapter and for every future chapter too :D

Also, thank you all so much for getting this fic to 1000 kudos! It's extremely rewarding to see that so many people have enjoyed my fic enough to leave one. It feels like I've reached a milestone I wasn't expecting to get anywhere close toahaha. Honestly, I ironically don't have the words to express how happy I am! Thank you all :)

That being said, I hope you all enjoy my writing! If there are any mistakes then whoops, my bad!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It takes Kaito a little longer than usual to get out of bed the next morning. His bones feel like anchors weighing him down and he fights against the urge to face plant back onto his pillow and go back to sleep.

Kaito, however, has an image to maintain and if he starts giving up now then that means everyone else will too. It's far too early to throw in the towel despite how difficult things are at the moment. He begrudgingly gets out of bed and gets ready for the day a little slower than usual, plastering a smile on his face as leaves his room.

He had to all but drag Shuichi to his own room last night. The detective had protested the entire way and in the end Kaito basically pushed him into his room and slammed the door behind him, calling out a very quick goodnight in the process.

Kaito hesitates outside of Shuichi's room for a moment and wonders if he should've perhaps tried to talk to him more yesterday. He's not trying to make up excuses but yesterday was so fucking intense. It was just one thing after another and even now Kaito is still trying to wrap his head around everything. Danganronpa? Everyone is a *character*? The outside world *loves* killing games? Kaito wrinkles his nose as he feels a slight headache make itself known. It's far too damn early to be spiralling over shit he can't control.

Still, maybe he should've stayed with his sidekick for just a little longer than he did. Sure, he can't say he remembers Shuichi all that well but if he's his sidekick then Kaito is sure as hell going to keep him under his wing and look after him. Shuichi definitely looks like someone who needs a

little extra support anyway. Kaito can't count the number of times Shuichi had averted his gaze away from everyone yesterday. Kaito can't tell if the detective is just shy or has really bad confidence.

The astronaut gingerly knocks on Shuichi's door, deciding that it's probably a little too early to start spamming the doorbell. The door ends up creaking open at the slightest touch and Kaito blinks before poking his head into the room.

"Saihara? You okay?"

Kaito quickly lowers his voice once he notices Shuichi fast asleep on his bed. Shuichi must've crashed the moment his head hit the pillow since he still has his shoes on. Kaito blinks before slowly closing the door as carefully as he can. He's not the type to let people lie in, especially if there's work that needs to be done, but he thinks after all that has happened, well, he supposes one tiny lie in won't hurt.

Especially since Kaito still has no idea if Angie has moved the Exisal yet.

Honestly, if he wasn't so pissed off with Angie at the moment then he'd be impressed. Kaito isn't sure what fuelled Angie's decision to jump into the Exisal and run but he is surprised that she managed to get as far as she did with it.

He sneaks a peak outside, noticing right away that there's still a very obvious lack of a door in the doorframe. The glass is still in neat piles on the floor outside along with the other Exisals. Kaito also notices that the Monokubs are still sprawled about on the floor. He spots a couple of Maki's knives crudely poking out of the colourful bears. He instinctively flexes his hand and is more than pleased when he doesn't feel any pain.

Getting a knife rammed through his hand hurt like *fuck*. It was a pain that he can't describe other than it just *really* hurt a lot. In hindsight he supposes things could've been a lot worse for him. Maki could've shoved the knife somewhere else but she didn't. He supposes he's grateful that he didn't have to deal with such a brutal injury for too long, thank fuck the wall was fixed when it was. He doubts even Kirumi would've been able to magically fix the gaping hole in his hand.

Kaito stands in the middle of the dormitory and for a fleeting moment, he feels lost. He's never been the type of person to use maps and guides, instead always using his own instinct to pilot his way through everything. Now though? Well, it would be real fucking handy if he had some sort of hint to tell him what to do.

Get a grip, man! You told everyone yesterday that everything is going to be okay. What sort of man goes back on his word so quickly?

He's a little disappointed that he has to leave alone. He's not entirely sure what time it is but he supposes it's fairly early. The sun is only just starting to rise outside, blending in brightly against a watery orange and purple sky. He leaves the dormitory and ponders over confronting Angie before deciding arguing with her isn't a high priority at the moment.

If he's going to keep everyone safe and happy then he has to make sure he has the resources to do so. An astronaut would never willingly take off in a rocket without making sure they have the right supplies and the same thing applies for this situation too. It's been a while since anyone has had some food because of Tsumugi's stupid motive and Kaito hopes since it's technically over now, there should be some food in the fridge. He has no clue how this fucking school works anymore and he realises he'll probably worry less in the long run if he just throws all logic out of the metaphorical window. He just hopes that the fridge and cupboards have been magically filled back

up over night.

He heads to the dining room and throws the doors open. He's met with a table full of food that looks freshly prepared. He sees steam rise from a pot of porridge, honey trickle down the side of a stack of pancakes, specks of water sitting stubbornly on freshly washed fruit, cutlery lined up carefully in perfect rows...

Kaito almost jumps as Kirumi suddenly enters the dining room with even more bowls and plates running up and down her arms. She looks momentarily surprised to see him but her surprise is quickly replaced with a smile that looks a little too forced to be natural.

"Good morning, Momota," Kirumi says before he can get a word in. Her arms are like blurs as she fills the table with even more food. "I noticed that the kitchen must've been restocked at some point during the night so I've taken the liberty of making breakfast for everyone since it's been a while since anyone has been able to enjoy a decent meal."

"You made all this by yourself?" Kaito whistles lowly as he eyes the table, placing a hand on his hip.

Kirumi nods and turns her back on him as she angles a plate carefully so it looks even *more* appealing. "I realised whilst I was thinking up a menu this morning that I don't know everyone's preferences so I've made as wide a selection of food as possible. I try to not waste food when I can but considering the circumstances..." Kirumi sighs quietly. "I suppose that doesn't exactly matter anymore."

The amount of food on the table is probably enough to feed everyone at least three times over. Kirumi retreats into the kitchen the moment she finishes displaying the plates and Kaito realises that despite the table already being impressively filled, Kirumi still isn't done yet. He follows her into the kitchen and is hit with a delicious smell that makes his stomach grumble pitifully.

Logging out had removed all of his hunger pains but that doesn't change the fact that Kirumi's cooking is enough to make anyone stop in their tracks. He hears a kettle whistle and Kirumi quickly rushes over to tend to it.

"You need any help?"

Kirumi shakes her head. "I can assure you that I'm more than used to preparing multiple meals for people at once. Please, make yourself comfortable at the table and I'll bring you a drink at my earliest convenience." She pauses. "What drink do you prefer to have with your breakfast?"

An intense aura follows Kirumi around like a sickly perfume. Kaito almost feels overwhelmed as Kirumi stares at him expectantly, wringing her hands down by her waist a little too harshly. It takes Kaito a moment to notice just how desperate she looks, like if she doesn't serve Kaito right now then the world will explode.

"You doing okay, sidekick?" Kaito asks, causing Kirumi to blink. He's not surprised that Kirumi has taken it upon herself to make breakfast for everyone. He's also not surprised that everything looks so professional and delicious. What's bothering him is how much she's made and how much more she's planning to do. He sees bacon and eggs sizzling in the pan in the corner. He spots peeled oranges ready to be made into juice. There's already more than enough on the table and Kaito thinks Kirumi already knows this.

"Of course I'm fine," Kirumi responds calmly. "But I would like it if you would answer my question so I can prepare you a drink as soon as possible."

He shouldn't be surprised that the Ultimate Maid wants to make sure that he's as comfortable as humanly possible. Kirumi reminds him of a doting mother, well, perhaps a doting older sister fits better because of her age. He just doesn't think he can ignore how it almost sounds like she's *pleading* for him to give her something to do, how frantic she is for something to do so she can keep herself busy.

Maybe her way of dealing with yesterday's revelation is to keep herself as busy as possible so she doesn't have to think too much about it? Kirumi had been one of the more calmer people in the gym, although for a moment she had looked as equally as lost as Kaito felt at one point. Kaito supposes that whilst it's a good thing that she hasn't been broken by the news, is it really okay for her to overwork herself just to avoid overthinking?

"Hey, Tojo? You do remember that you're my sidekick, right?" Kaito asks.

Kirumi narrows her eyes and looks at Kaito as if he's just told her a complicated riddle. "...excuse me?"

"If you're worried then you gotta tell me, okay?" Kaito tells her. "I made it clear yesterday that I'm going to look after everyone whilst we're here and that includes you too, you know?" He looks around the kitchen and at all the progress Kirumi has already made making breakfast. "Don't you think you've already done more than enough for everyone?"

"My pride as the Ultimate Maid..." Kirumi abruptly stops before grimacing. "Is to make sure everyone is as comfortable as possible. I understand that you've decided that I'm your sidekick but I would also like to continue my duties as a maid too, which means doing tasks like making breakfast and keeping the school clean-"

"I get that! I mean, I totally can't wait to sit down and eat!" Kaito scratches the back of his head as he tries to think of the right words. "Just...don't push yourself, yeah?"

"...my apologies, it seems I have caused you to worry," Kirumi says quietly. "Momota, I must make it clear that I find joy in serving people. In fact, making breakfast this morning was the first time I felt any sense of normality after yesterday's events. Perhaps to you I might seem a little too eager to get work done but I can assure you that high intensity work is a welcome distraction for me."

Kirumi's hands loosen and her shoulders slump ever so slightly. She no longer looks like an overly rigid maid who looks desperate for distractions. She looks like a girl who just wants to get on with her day despite everything.

"You promise?" Kaito asks quietly.

Kirumi nods eagerly. "I must once again apologise profusely for causing such a misunderstanding. I failed to take into consideration that perhaps not everyone here is used to the standard of service I like to provide. What looks like a huge feast to you is simply just another small task in my eyes." She casts her gaze around the room silently before smiling softly. "However, perhaps I *have* gone ever so slightly overboard this morning."

Ah, so she is causing more work for herself for a reason. Kaito wonders if he should remind Kirumi that he wants her to use him as a crutch if she needs to but a timer suddenly goes off and Kirumi rushes towards a sea of pans and starts to tend to them.

"Before I forget to tell you, I've spoken with Yonaga this morning," Kirumi says to Kaito's surprise. "She's still insisting that she stays inside of the Exisal until further notice. I tried to gently

encourage her to get out of it but it seems she's set on blocking the exit for as long as she can."

Kaito groans quietly. That *wasn't* the news he was hoping for. He certainly doesn't want to have to resort to physically moving her himself. He doubts Kirumi will even let him get close enough to touch her. She was startlingly quick when she apprehended Maki last night. Even Kaito didn't notice Kirumi move until her hand was around Maki's wrist like a vice.

"Damn it..." He gets it, Angie's scared and lashing out. It's just the fact she's decided to lash out in the most inconvenient way possible. Shuichi had made it pretty clear he needs to have access to the office tonight so he can negotiate and Kaito has a feeling if the detective isn't able to leave soon then he's probably going to combust. Well, not literally of course. "What do you think the chances of her moving today are?"

"Fairly slim," Kirumi reluctantly admits. "However, you must understand that she's confused and most likely very frightened. Yesterday was a disturbing revelation, Momota. And not only is everyone dealing with that, they're also dealing with what Harukawa did too."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"A lot of people woke up whilst Harukawa was in the middle of her attack," Kirumi reveals with a grimace. Kaito feels his stomach drop. "And most of them said they only stayed in their rooms because you told them too, myself included." She chews her lip. "When I heard the door smash I honestly thought that...well, she killed someone."

"S-She was *sick*, remember?" Kaito quickly counters. Are people seriously scared of Maki because of what happened? "She had no control over the situation-"

"And neither did you," Kirumi says. "It would be naïve of you to presume that everyone is going to move on from last night quickly. Even now there's still the threat of Shirogane causing something as equally as drastic to happen. Asking for everyone to stay here where we're next to powerless was a big ask of Saihara. It was also a big ask of you to ask for everyone to say yes to him. What if Shirogane makes Harukawa sick again? You certainly weren't able to stop her and I doubt I could either."

"Chabashira sorted her out though!" Kaito points out.

"We can't rely on Chabashira all of the time though," Kirumi responds. "And I must remind you that Harukawa was ready to go after Yonaga last night even when she wasn't under any influence. I understand that you trust Harukawa but I made a promise that if she ever posed herself as a threat then-"

"Yesterday was just a one off!" Kaito blurts out before he can stop himself. He's surprised by how oddly defensive he feels. Yesterday he had been the one to ask Maki to stop talking about the attack. Now that his head feels a little clearer, he suddenly feels disappointed with how he handled things. His sidekick *needed* him and he bulldozed over Maki's attempt to talk to him. He didn't even try to comfort her when she clearly needed support. Fuck, he really needs to get a grip.

"Even so, I would like to make it clear that I do not condone threatening behaviour," Kirumi says, narrowing her eyes as Kaito opens his mouth. "I'm not saying that I don't trust Harukawa. In fact, I'm grateful for everything that she's done so far. That doesn't give her a free pass to do whatever she wants however."

Kaito crosses his arms and lets out a loud sigh. "I get what you're saying! It's just...I'm pretty sure she's got her own way of looking out for people. Maybe threatening to move Angie herself was

crossing a line but Harukawa, fuck, she's not a threat. She's one of us."

Kirumi's lips thin and a slight crease grows between her brows. "I understand that. However I have also decided that it's my top priority to make sure that everyone here is comfortable. Whilst I don't particularly want to have to treat anyone here like a threat, I have already made it clear that I will if I must do so." She turns her attention back to the kitchen. "And that is all I have to say on the matter."

And just like that the conversation dies a brutal death. Kaito stares at the maid for a couple of seconds before realising that she's probably done them both a favour by turning her attention back to her cooking. He looks around the kitchen helplessly, wondering if he should offer to help the maid when he's saved by the sound of the dining room door opening. He leaves the kitchen a little more quickly than intended and cheers up almost instantly as he notices Ryoma examining the table.

The tennis player's eyes noticeably light up as Kaito makes his way over to him. "Didn't expect you to be up so early, Momota."

"Well I couldn't get back to sleep so I decided fuck it, time to seize the day!" Kaito proudly responds and slams his knuckles together enthusiastically. He must admit that despite everything, despite the whole fictional character bullshit, he can't help but feel giddy that he's standing next to Ryoma. He *loves* this guy! He admired Ryoma so much as a child because of how cool he was. Hell, he even joined his school's tennis club because of him!

Ryoma looks up at him and Kaito notices the corner of his lips quirk up. "Is that so?"

Kaito nods. "Yeah, well, I'm used to waking up early anyway! Back at home I'd always wake up before sunrise so I could fit in some exercise before getting on with my day. I live right in the middle of the countryside so I'd always run around the fields and..."

Well, he *thought* he lived in the countryside. Who the fuck knows where he lives now. Kaito awkwardly clears his throat as Ryoma tactfully looks away.

"Anyway! Exercise! Absolutely love it," Kaito continues. That's not a lie either. If he wants to make it as an astronaut then he's got to make sure that his body is in tip-top shape! How can he be the Luminary of the Stars if his body isn't up to the task? "I mean, you must feel the same way, right? Because you're a tennis player?"

"Honestly I wasn't really the sort of person who exercised much before I got into tennis," Ryoma admits. "Just found out one day I was really good at it and exercised regularly so I could keep playing."

"Really?" Kaito looks genuinely surprised for a moment before he starts to grin. "Wow, it was super lucky of you to find out that you had a knack for tennis when you did then!"

"Yeah, it was." Ryoma shoves his hands into his pocket before nodding at the table. "Tojo make all this?"

Kaito nods. "I love my grandparent's cooking but Tojo's skills are on a whole new different level! Just look at it all!"

Ryoma takes a second to look at all the food. It only grabs his attention momentarily before he's back to looking at Kaito again. "Did she do all this by herself?"

"Yeah! It's super impressive, right? I don't expect anything less from one of my sidekicks!"

“Sidekick, huh?” Ryoma’s smile dims.

“Well of course I made her one!” Kaito eagerly responds. He’s then filled with the desperate need to ask Ryoma a very, *very* serious question. “Are you also one of my sidekicks?!” He never had the chance to find out who all his sidekicks are yesterday and Kaito very much wants to remedy this. He stares at Ryoma intensely. Fuck, having Ryoma as a sidekick would be *so* cool.

Ryoma blinks before nodding slowly. He takes a step back as Kaito pumps his fist fervently, dodging the astronaut’s elbow.

“Hell yeah!” Kaito’s grin grows so wide that his cheeks start to hurt. “Aw man, past me had such good taste!” He pauses. “You still want to be my sidekick, right?” Now he’s not saying he’ll cry if Ryoma says no but the very thought of Ryoma declining to be his sidekick *can* and *will* bring him to his knees.

Ryoma swallows before offering Kaito a small nod. “Yeah, I’d really like that.”

Hell fucking yeah! Kaito ruffles Ryoma’s hat so enthusiastically that it almost falls off his head. “Good answer, sidekick!”

His merry group of sidekicks is growing slowly but surely. How many people are his sidekicks now? He has Shuichi, right? Oh! There’s also Kaede too. If he also adds Kirumi and Ryoma to the mix then that makes four sidekicks! *Four!*

Does he dare push his luck?

“Hey, uh, do you happen to know if I have any more sidekicks?” Kaito asks.

“I think I read somewhere you made Harukawa into a sidekick and during the last game you asked Chabashira to be one too,” Ryoma answers. Holy shit. He has *six entire sidekicks*? Six!? Kaito almost starts to vibrate with excitement. “I could be wrong though.”

Kaito decides to remain optimistic. “Aw man, I have six whole sidekicks?”

“You really love making people your sidekicks, huh?” Ryoma points out, looking rather amused.

“I like helping people,” Kaito responds earnestly. He rubs his chin. Hmm, he knows it’s a little ambitious but what if he...what if he finds himself even more sidekicks? Sure, it would be silly of him to turn people into his sidekicks for no reason but he *swears* he has some sort of system going.

Ryoma smiles before turning his head away. Huh. Is Ryoma okay? He’s smiling but there’s something sad about the look in his eyes. “You sure do.”

Man, it’s so weird being able to talk to Ryoma so casually. Okay, sure, it sucks to know that Kaito’s childhood memories are fabricated but he still feels a lot of respect for the tennis player. It is also somewhat of a surprise to see Ryoma so...chilled out. Kaito would’ve thought years in prison might’ve made him more, well, depressed. Damn, maybe Ryoma has been through a lot of personal growth? Either way, Kaito can’t help but feel proud of him for some reason.

“Speaking of helping people though.” Ryoma’s expression turns serious. “How are you holding up, Momota? Know that you said you wanted to look after everyone yesterday but it still must’ve been a shock to learn that we’re all fictional characters.”

“I mean...it was weird to hear but at the same time...” Kaito looks up at the ceiling thoughtfully. “It doesn’t actually change anything, does it? I’m still the Luminary of the Stars and you’re still

Hoshi.”

“Does it not worry you that there’s people who want to change us though?” Ryoma asks. “That there’s a high chance that once we leave, we’re going to…” Ryoma swallows heavily, as if there’s a lump in his throat. “Forget everything?”

“Nah, of course I don’t have to worry about shit like that. My sidekick has everything under control!” Kaito reassures him. Well, Shuichi *will* have everything under control once he can leave but Kaito has faith that everything will turn out okay.

Ryoma pulls a face. “You mean Saihara?”

“Well who else would I be talking about?”

Ryoma silently looks at the floor before letting out a loud sigh. “Does he actually have everything under control though?”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“I mean…” Ryoma sighs again. “He’s obviously not coping as well as he wants us all to think. I just don’t think it’s right of us to expect him to fix everything, especially since he’s barely even looking after himself at the moment.”

“...huh?”

“He’s stressed, Momota,” Ryoma says. “And rapidly on his way to burning himself out. I’m not saying that it’s his fault that he’s struggling but honestly…I don’t think he has everything under control. In fact, I think if anything, he might be making things worse.”

Kaito stares dumbfounded at Ryoma before laughing nervously. “What are you on about?”

“Listen, I get that you believe in all your sidekicks,” Ryoma tells him. “But sometimes it’s alright to retreat and think of a new plan when something isn’t working. What Saihara is trying to do is, well, basically impossible. I know you like to encourage people but…what Saihara needs right now is someone like you to tell him that he needs to back off and maybe let someone else take over for a little while.”

Someone like me? “You don’t believe in him?”

“I…think he’s deluding himself into thinking that if he keeps trying then everything will magically fall into place. That’s just wishful thinking though,” Ryoma says. “Can’t be angry at him for wanting to fix everything but I am angry that he expects everyone to feel the same way as him, that he wants to continue putting us all through needless bullshit when it’s obvious he’s going to fail.”

“Woah, woah, woah!” Kaito almost shudders as he notices the dark look on Ryoma’s face. “Where the hell is all of this coming from?”

Ryoma pauses. The anger in his eyes simmers down to something more tired looking. “Ah…sorry. Probably shouldn’t have worded it like that.”

Kaito takes a moment to let Ryoma’s words sink in. Ryoma clearly doesn’t think that Shuichi is doing the right thing, which is rather baffling. Ryoma definitely doesn’t seem like the type of person who wants the killing games to continue but why is he so hell bent on getting Shuichi to stop? Isn’t Shuichi doing the *right* thing?

"I don't think he has bad intentions," Ryoma says carefully after a long stretch of silence. "Good people are capable of doing bad things, it happens all the time. It's just what Saihara wants to accomplish...how far he'll go to get what he wants..." The tennis player tugs on his hat. "We all had to wait in a small office whilst he negotiated and he didn't even tell us what he was up to until he had no other choice. His motives are...warped to say the least."

"What do you mean that they're warped?" Kaito asks, wrinkling his nose. "And you're telling me he kept you all locked in an office?"

"...basically," Ryoma answers with a wince. "Sorry, I'm not trying to paint Saihara as a bad person. Misguided? Sure. I don't think he's putting us all through hell to be malicious but if he doesn't get a grip and soon, he's really going to reach a point of no return."

Well there goes Kaito's good mood! Kaito slumps down onto a chair as he stares at the table absentmindedly. Fuck. He wishes everything would stop being so complicated. He doesn't want to doubt Ryoma, especially because of how sincere he sounds. He also doesn't want to doubt Shuichi either because that look in his eye when he said he wanted to put an end to Danganronpa...it was like the air had turned *electric*. Kaito had wholeheartedly believed that Shuichi had the ability to accomplish anything.

"Didn't mean to put you in a bad mood," Ryoma says as he takes a seat next to the astronaut. He sighs quietly. "I know how you get when it comes to your sidekicks. It's just..."

"For now, he's asleep so there's no need to worry about him," Kaito responds before massaging his forehead. "And until Angie moves, it's not like we've got much of a choice when it comes to where we stay either."

"Ah, that's right," Ryoma murmurs. "She still blocking the exit?"

Kaito nods. "Tojo checked on her this morning. She's still refusing to budge."

"Tch..." Ryoma pulls a face that suggests he isn't happy. "Was hoping I could check in on Ouma this morning. Haven't seen him so I presume he's still in the office."

Oh fuck. How did he forget about Kokichi being in the office? "You don't think there's an issue with the, uh, pods, do you?"

"There shouldn't be," Ryoma answers with a frown. "Either he's still too sick to move or he's decided to not come back for whatever reason." He huffs and crosses his arms tightly. "Knew I should've stayed with him."

"I'm sure he'll be fine," Kaito reassures him, although he can't help but start to worry. He doesn't like that the group isn't whole. "Right?"

"...hopefully," Ryoma murmurs, doubt creeping into his voice.

Kaito doesn't like how worried Ryoma sounds. He once again ruffles his hat and this time Ryoma bats his hands away. "You know, I didn't think you were the type to worry so much."

"Eh?"

An innocent smile grows on Kaito's face. "Well, you always came off as cool and mysterious when you played tennis. I thought you were the type of guy who was super laid back. Guess I was wrong about that, huh?"

"I...guess so," Ryoma mumbles and shyly lowers his head. "This is the first time in a very long time that I've had people to worry about so, ah, perhaps I'm coming off as a little overbearing."

"Nah, it's good that you care," Kaito reassures him. He rolls his shoulders in an attempt to get more comfortable. "So who are these people you really care about? They must be the luckiest people in the world if you're fretting about them in a situation like this."

"Ah..." Ryoma turns his head away quickly and acts like a random strip of wallpaper has suddenly stolen his attention. "They're..."

"They're people you've met here, right?" Kaito presses carefully before realising that maybe he's being a little too nosy. Then a horrible realisation hits him out of nowhere. Ryoma is one of the few people who remembers a lot more than everyone else. He's someone who has been through a game, meaning he's also someone who has lost people to the loops.

How could he be so *dense*?

Ryoma nods silently and Kaito notices that he's chewing down on his lip heavily. "Yeah."

Fuck. Kaito doesn't want to be responsible for making his childhood hero *cry*. What sort of hero reduces their sidekick to tears? He starts to fret and looks around the room for inspiration so he can change the subject as quickly as possible.

However, before Kaito can awkwardly start a new topic, Ryoma speaks up. "You're one of them. Of course you are. There's also Chabashira and Ouma too. The four of us were...a rather strange group but we all worked."

"Really?" Kaito tries to imagine the four of them hanging out together and-

They're outside. Kaito and Tenko are lying on the grass and Kaito is determined to prove to Tenko that he can do a thousand push ups in under ten seconds. Sitting under the gazebo are Ryoma and Kokichi. Ryoma looks exasperated whilst Kokichi watches on gleefully.

They're a weird combination but they work. They don't get any actual training done but Kaito finds that he's having too much fun to care.

"Momota?"

There's a frown on Ryoma's face as he cautiously waves his hand in front of Kaito's eyes. The astronaut blinks before laughing nervously.

"Sorry, I must've zoned out for a moment."

"You okay?"

Kaito nods quickly. "Yeah! Yeah, of course I am!"

Ryoma hesitates before relenting. "There's also Iruma too. She's someone I also care about. She's...the only friend I got to leave my game with."

The tennis player's expression hardens and Kaito feels a pang of sympathy. "I'm sorry, man."

"You've got nothing to be sorry for," Ryoma murmurs before shaking his head with a weak chuckle. "I'm sorry for making the conversation so depressing."

"Hey! You definitely don't need to apologise!" Kaito insists. "You're my sidekick! I *want* you to

be able to talk to me when you need to!”

Ryoma sighs, although this one sounds more fond than annoyed. “And I expect the same from you too. If I’m your sidekick then that means it’s my job to support you, got it?”

It takes a couple of seconds for Ryoma’s words to sink in. He can’t lie, Ryoma has caught him by surprise.

...aw man, Ryoma is totally in a completely different league of cool compared to him.

“By the way,” Ryoma says before Kaito is completely lost in his thoughts. “Do you maybe want to play a game of tennis some time? It doesn’t have to be today since you’re probably going to have your hands full dealing with other stuff but, you know, if we do end up having to stay here for a little while...”

A game of tennis with *the* Ryoma Hoshi? “Hell yeah!”

Kaito ends up instinctively raising his hand for a high five to celebrate. Ryoma blinks before slapping their hands together.

It’s the best high five Kaito has ever done.

—

“So this is the machine that makes the flashback lights?”

As Miu examines the five blue monitors with what can only be described as a starved look in her eyes, Kaede stands in front of a complicated panel with Rantaro and Himiko on either side of her.

During breakfast the mage had offered to show Miu where the flashback light machine was since the inventor had seemed really interested in it yesterday. Kaede initially had planned to help Kaito out with talking to Angie but after Rantaro suggested tagging along with Himiko and Miu, the pianist decided that she would too. Besides, the look on Himiko’s face when Kaede had asked if she could come along makes her glad that she did.

“I don’t really know how it works,” Himiko admits with a worried look on her face. “It was Saihara who used it after he found it. He clicked some options and a flashback light appeared in one of those lockers over there.”

Himiko points to two lockers that are next to the monitors. Miu eyes them both curiously and starts to open and close one of the locker doors over and over again. “Huh...”

Rantaro, who Kaede has come to learn is a *very* curious person when he wants to be, presses down on the panel and neon blue words float onto the screen.

“Hello...Game Master?” Kaede murmurs as the words flicker sporadically.

“I think mastermind fits better,” Himiko grumbles, crossing her arms. “Game Master sounds too *nice*, especially since the machine is referring to Shirogane.”

“Yeah, mastermind sounds more sinister. Suits her *perfectly*,” Rantaro mumbles as he pulls his hand away.

“How the fuck did Shirogane manage to use something like this and not get caught?” Miu mutters as she takes a step back to look at the monitors herself. “It’s fucking huge!”

“If you leave the room then everything shuts down automatically,” Himiko explains before dashing out of the room.

Kaede takes a step back as the podium in front of her vanishes, blinking a couple of times just to confirm that what she just witnessed wasn’t just an illusion. Miu lets out an impressed whistle as Himiko steps back into the room, shaking her hands as if she has just finished a complicated magic trick.

“How the fuck did I not have a clue that something so advanced was literally right under my nose?” Miu huffs as she stomps over to where Kaede is and turns the machine back on. She nudges Kaede away with a swing of her hips and starts to rapidly press down on the panel, ignoring Kaede as she tells the inventor off for pushing her.

Himiko shrugs as she plops herself down onto a desk. She kicks her legs back and forth as she watches Miu scroll through the different options at a dizzying speed. “Well Saihara only found it because Kiibo destroyed the classroom and saw something weird.”

Rantaro raises an eyebrow. “Kiibo...destroyed a *classroom*?”

“Well he technically destroyed the school,” Himiko says before putting a finger to her lip. “Actually he kind of destroyed *everything*.”

“Really?” Kaede’s eyes go wide as she tries to imagine someone like Kiibo causing such destruction. She knows he can be overly serious but to take out everything? Maybe she has completely underestimated him.

“Aw man, I wish I got to see that,” Miu laments.

Himiko grimaces. “I think he also destroyed himself.”

“Is there anything he *didn’t* destroy?” Rantaro asks, clearly trying to move the conversation along as quickly as he can. He must’ve noticed the sad look on Miu’s face.

The mage pauses before nodding. “He made sure Saihara, Harukawa and I were safe even though all three of us were supposed to be punished.”

Kaede and Rantaro share a concerned look whilst Miu stares at Himiko like she’s just told her the worst joke in the world. “What the literal fuck *happened* during your game? And here I thought the shit Shirogane put me through during mine was absolutely insane.”

Himiko once again shrugs helplessly as Kaede nods her head sagely. “I’m going to guess Shirogane caused *all* of us problems nearing the end of our games.” Ugh. All she can picture is Tsumugi’s wild face as she realised she was stuck in some sort of torturous loop. Kaede shudders.

“I’m surprised she’s still in her room,” Himiko grumbles. “I thought she would’ve tried to give us another motive or something by now.”

“Shirogane might be desperate for a killing game but I don’t think she’s completely stupid,” Rantaro responds. “Still, as long as we all know where she is then she’s going to find it hard to do anything risky. She’s probably realised since we can all leave whenever we want, well, once Angie moves anyway, there’s no point trying to start anything.”

“I’ll curse her if she dares to do anything,” Himiko promises, adjusting her hat so it shadows her face. “And then I’ll curse her a *second* time for good measure.”

Kaede smiles brightly. Hearing Himiko refer to using magic is a welcome relief. The pianist is glad to see that Himiko looks a little happier today. When Himiko notices Kaede's smile, she blinks slowly before a lazy grin grows on her face.

The pianist spots that both Rantaro and Miu are examining the panel together, although Miu looks like she's more confident about what she's doing. Rantaro alternates between watching Miu's hands fly across the holographic keyboard and keeping an eye on the monitors.

Kaede takes a seat next to Himiko and watches as Miu goes through the different options. It's weird to see all of the options on offer. It's even more weird knowing that the flashback lights are capable of influencing people to remember and do things. Clearly the lights were designed to create a plot for Tsumugi's killing game. Kaede can't help but feel sick as she thinks about how easily Tsumugi managed to control everyone once upon a time.

"Ultimate Talent, Ultimate Hunt..." Miu's face scrunches up as she whizzes through the options. "Not gonna lie, most of these mean fuck all to me."

"They don't really matter," Himiko tells her. "They only make us remember fake memories anyway."

"Still though, I can't believe that there's a machine that can create memories just like that," Miu murmurs as she starts to get a little too engrossed with the machine. "Whoever made this must be a fucking genius! Well, not as big a genius as *me* but still..."

The inventor lazily goes through each category and Kaede watches curiously. Unfortunately nothing really makes sense to her. Miu is probably the only person in the room who might have some idea about how the machine works but judging from the slight frown on her face, Kaede is starting to doubt that even the inventor understands the ins and outs of it completely. Still, at least the machine is creating a welcome distraction for everyone in the room.

Miu clicks down on a button relating to motives and a long string of options appears. Kaede swallows heavily. If Tsumugi manages to escape and create a flashback light using one of these options then will a murder happen?

"Transfer Student from Beyond the Grave? What the fuck sort of motive is this?" Miu mutters as she clicks down on it.

"It was the third motive in our game," Himiko explains. "Monokuma gave us a book, um, called the Necronomicon I think? He said if we used it then he'd bring someone back from the dead."

"Ah! He used that motive with us too!" Kaede adds. "I ended up hiding the book in the library though because we all decided it was too dangerous to use."

Himiko winces as she looks down at the floor with a forlorn look on her face. "Angie, um, decided we should use it in my game. Looking back on it now...nyeh. I can't believe I wanted to use it."

"I wouldn't worry about things that are already over and done with," Rantaro reassures her. He narrows his eyes at the monitors and holds up a hand to stop Miu. "Hold on a second, Iruma. Go back down again."

"Hah? Why?"

Miu huffs but does what she's told. She scrolls back down the huge block of writing in the transfer student section. Kaede quickly realises that there aren't many options to pick from but instead a long list of instructions regarding how to proceed if someone actually uses the Necronomicon. A

particular passage catches her eye.

*“If a character deviates from the script and somehow manages to use the Necronomicon then don’t panic! The transfer student will be added onto the planned list of survivors to avoid any more script changes. On the slim chance someone **must** be resurrected, the Game Master is advised to befriend the transfer student so they can keep an eye on them and make sure the game runs smoothly.”*

“It almost sounds like the motive...wasn’t planned to be actually used,” Kaede points out.

“Nyeh, I think you’re right,” Himiko agrees. “Angie never got the chance to actually use the Necronomicon before she was...killed. Half of the group didn’t even want to bring someone back anyway since they didn’t trust the motive in the first place.”

“I’m just impressed how thought out the original game was,” Rantaro says as he swats Miu’s hands away so she stops scrolling. The inventor grumbles loudly and crosses her arms as Rantaro reads the screen slowly, mumbling everything he reads under his breath. “They even planned what would happen on the off chance the book was actually used. Impressive.”

“Angie wanted to bring you back, Amami,” Himiko reveals, causing Rantaro to shoot her a surprised look.

“Me?”

Himiko nods numbly. “Since you were the only person who wasn’t a...” The mage nervously glances up at Kaede before quickly retreating under her hat. “Murderer at the time...nyeh, well, we *thought* you were the only person who wasn’t a murderer...”

“It’s okay, I know about Shirogane setting me up,” Kaede tells her gently. She’s hit with a mixture of pity and anger. Pity for Himiko and anger towards Tsumugi.

“...I suppose in the long run I’m glad I was never brought back,” Rantaro admits.

“Hah? Why’s that?” Miu asks curiously.

“Well, you know...” Rantaro suddenly turns his attention back to the monitors. “Ah, it’s embarrassing if I say the real reason out loud.”

A very lazy cat-like grin grows on Himiko’s face as she looks up once again at Kaede. “You’re glad you got to spend more time with Kaede, right?”

Miu’s jaw drops open as quickly realises the implication behind Himiko’s words. She starts to smirk as she nudges Rantaro’s arm over and over. “Is that so?”

Kaede pouts before glowering at Miu. “Stop trying to embarrass him!”

“Hee! I-I was only teasing!”

Rantaro looks extremely grateful for Kaede’s assistance. He clears his throat loudly before gesturing towards the monitors. “We should probably go back to focusing on this.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Miu grumbles dejectedly, obviously disappointed that she’s lost the chance to tease someone. “Can you hurry the fuck up so I can go back to examining everything? What the hell is so important about this motive anyway? All there is is a big buncha useless text.”

“I thought I saw a...” Rantaro makes a pleased noise as he slowly scrolls to the bottom of the text. “Ah, I knew I saw a button.”

Honestly, Kaede is surprised that there’s an option to create a flashback light regarding this particular motive. On the extremely slim off chance someone had to be brought back, wouldn’t they just have been loaded back into the simulation? Flashback lights are used to alter or add memories, right? Kaede stares at the machine with a look of pure confusion.

Rantaro clicks on the button to create a flashback light and a loading screen appears. The loading line stutters a couple of times before reaching the end and the large monitor in the middle reveals a new menu.

Since Miu had already pressed a similar button before, the menu doesn’t surprise Kaede. Usually there’s just a brief explanation at the top of the screen explaining what the flashback light will do. Kaede idly reads through the explanation since she has nothing else better to do.

“Once a student dies, they are logged out and their memories of their time in the simulation are wiped by the staff outside straight away. On the off chance a transfer student is brought into the academy, they will have no recollection of their time in the simulation. To remedy this, an emergency option is available to choose that will create a flashback light that will restore every single memory the transfer student has linked to their time spent in the simulation.”

*“Warning, the student that you use this flashback light on will remember **everything** from the moment they woke up to when they died. Good luck, Game Master.”*

“...huh?” Kaede licks her lips, realising how dry they’ve become. She reads through the instructions over and over, wondering if what she’s just read is right. A flashback light that is capable of...restoring memories?

“I...I didn’t think a flashback light like this existed,” Himiko mumbles, a conflicted look on her face.

“...I almost scrolled past this,” Miu mutters. “Can’t believe an option like this was hidden under so much fucking text. Fuck.”

“Hold on just a second,” Rantaro says. He sounds calm but there’s a deep frown on his face that only gets worse as he turns away from the machine. “This is a case of all or nothing. If this flashback light truly works then...it has the ability to restore everything. I’m going to guess that it also includes the memories of dying too.”

Kaede barely manages to suppress a shudder and sidles away from the machine ever so slightly, almost falling off the desk she’s on in the process. “Ah...that’s right.”

This is...so cruel. Kaede knows that some of her friends would do absolutely anything to get their old friends back. Kaede herself would love the chance to make people like Kaito and Tenko remember their time with her. However, the mere thought of putting them through something so sadistic like making them remember how they died? Kaede wouldn’t *dare* do something so inhumane.

“Maybe...maybe we’re getting our hopes up too quickly?” Himiko suggests, although her clenched fists suggest that she’s trying to hold back her desperation. “Maybe the Necronomicon has to be used first before a flashback light can even be made?”

Miu pulls a face at the doubtful suggestion and as if to prove a point, presses down on the *create*

button at the bottom of the screen. Kaede winces as she hears a loud thud that echoes around the room. Straight away everyone turns to the lockers.

At first no one is brave enough to approach the lockers. In the end it's Rantaro who reluctantly heads over to them and slowly creaks a locker door open. He crouches down, back turned to everyone. When he turns around to face everyone, there's a flashback light in his hands.

"...oh," Himiko murmurs softly.

"What...what do we do with it?" Kaede asks tentatively, staring at the light as if it's a sleeping baby that she doesn't want to wake up. She turns to Miu and Himiko for any suggestions but they both look as lost as her. Miu shrugs whilst Himiko stammers helplessly.

"How do we even know it actually works?" Himiko points out apprehensively.

"Well...we'd have to use it to find out," Kaede answers. She feels her heart hammering in her chest, a feeling of unease brewing in her stomach. The words fall out of her mouth naturally but straight away she wishes she didn't say anything at all. Making someone use it means making someone...go through something unspeakable.

Rantaro swallows as he gingerly rotates the flashlight in his hands. "And is that a good idea?"

"Probably not," Kaede murmurs, eyes transfixed on the flashlight.

"Tch, of course we end up finding something like this," Miu complains as she crosses her arms tightly. She glares at the flashlight as if it's suddenly gained the ability to speak and has said something incredibly offensive. "Fuck...imagine if we could've picked what memories it restores. God, that would've been a better find."

Of course it would. Kaede, however, learned a very long time ago to have very low expectations when it comes to the simulation. She's disappointed that her hopes of getting her friends back are quickly dashed but she's not heartless. "It might be for the best if we pretend we didn't find this option in the first place."

"You want to...hide this from everyone?" Himiko asks hesitantly.

"I just think..." Kaede sighs, running a stressed hand through her hair. "I don't think most of us are in the right mindset to be given the choice to do something so...rash. Besides, we don't even know if it works and I don't think it's worth the risk of turning it on either."

"...maybe there's a different option that restores only select memories?" Miu suggests, more so to herself. She hastily goes through the options once more, this time being more thorough with her searching. Kaede can't help but feel pity as it becomes increasingly more and more obvious that such an option doesn't exist. The only thing that comes remotely close is another emergency flashback light that resets everyone's memories and makes them think they've only just woken up again in the simulation. If she's remembering right, Monokuma had to use that flashback light on everyone at the start of the last game.

As Miu swears bitterly at the machine, Rantaro places himself next to Kaede, the flashlight still clasped tightly in his hands. Kaede can't help but feel uneasy being so close to it.

"Don't you think that..." Rantaro pauses, his thumb stroking the flashlight's switch carefully.

"Don't you think that maybe it's worth trying it out just to see if it actually works?"

"You want to use it?" Kaede asks. She must sound a little too surprised since Rantaro immediately winces, looking down at the flashlight with a complicated look on his face. "Ah, sorry. I didn't

mean to sound so accusing!”

“It’s fine,” Rantaro says. He takes a deep breath. “I just...I don’t know. I’m not expecting all of us to use it, of course. However, we all clearly want to know if it works and, well, if you think about it logically, wouldn’t I be the best person to try it out on?”

“Nyeh?!” Himiko’s eyes go wide. “You want to use it on *yourself*?!”

Rantaro shrugs weakly. “If it *does* restore every memory of someone’s time in the simulation then that would mean it should restore my memories from the other game I was in, right? I was only alive for what? A couple days? Compared to some of other people here, I won’t have as many bad memories to deal with-”

“You might remember dying!” Kaede hastily points out and almost instinctively snatches the flashlight from his hands. “No, you definitely *will* remember dying! Just because we found out we can restore memories doesn’t mean we should right off the bat!”

She knows Rantaro is more curious than the average person but she doesn’t think she could forgive herself if she stands back and lets him use something so scary without giving it much thought.

Rantaro’s lips thin and for a second there’s something akin to frustration in his eyes. He then blinks before sighing, his entire body going lax as he shakes his head tiredly. “Sorry, you’re right.”

Kaede narrows her eyes and before he can stop her, she takes the flashlight from his hands. She can feel guilty for snatching something from him later. “Let’s just...focus on one thing at a time, okay? For now, getting Angie to move so we can get access to the office again is our number one priority. Until then, it’s better off if we pretend that the flashback light making machine doesn’t even exist.”

She’s not sure what possesses her to throw the flashback light onto the floor, causing it to smash. However, the moment she sees it break, she feels like she’s done the right thing.

“Fucking hell, Bakamatsu! Give a girl some warning next time!” Miu barks as she takes a step back to avoid standing on any of the broken pieces of metal.

“Ah! Sorry!” Kaede smiles sheepishly as Miu grumbles something about Kaede being stupid, which the pianist supposes she deserves. She hops from the desk, Himiko copying her. The two make sure to dodge the broken scraps of metal. Kaede even goes as far to kick some of the pieces under the desk.

“So what do we do now?” Himiko asks.

“We...do what I said before. Pretend that this machine doesn’t even exist. If someone does end up asking about it, definitely don’t mention anything about the memory restoring flashlight, got it?” Kaede sternly looks around the room.

Miu withers under her blunt glare. “G-Got it!”

Rantaro hesitates before sighing quietly. “Got it.”

For a second, Kaede remains dubious. She watches Rantaro leave the room quietly and stares at his back until it’s a blur in the distance, worry coiling around her ribs and squeezing to the point her chest starts to hurt.

—

Kaito's day can be summed up pretty much with one word. *Shit*.

He fails to get Angie to move. Korekiyo refuses to even entertain the idea that all of his memories are fake. Tenko is too tearful to hold a conversation with. He doesn't get the chance to talk to Maki all day. Shuichi is dedicating all of his time to bickering with Angie. Kokichi still hasn't returned. All in all, today has been absolutely fucking bullshit.

Kaito massages his temples slowly, hoping he can fight off the headache that is slowly starting to brew behind his eyes. He knew that guiding everyone through this wasn't going to be easy. He just didn't expect everyone to be so...*difficult*. Well, that's not fair. Kirumi has been an excellent help when it comes to keeping everyone fed and Ryoma has offered his support multiple times throughout the day. Gonta and Kiibo have also been rather easy to appease due to their passive natures.

He was hoping Angie would've at least let Shuichi out so he can negotiate but when she said she was keeping everyone in the simulation she really *did* mean everyone. Even when Ryoma had pleaded with her so he could bring Kokichi in, she didn't budge, saying that Kokichi would come in when he's ready and she'll welcome him with open arms.

The astronaut isn't surprised that Shuichi is still outside arguing with Angie, well, at this point it's basically him begging for her to let him out for even five minutes. Kaito just didn't think Angie of all people could be so stubborn.

He hears a knock at his door and he barely manages to suppress a groan as the sound aggravates his headache. For a selfish split second he thinks about ignoring whoever is outside but as soon as he thinks this his entire mouth tastes sour. What sort of hero fucking turns their back on someone when they're asking for help?

Kaito answers the door a little too enthusiastically to make up for his moment of weakness and is surprised to see Maki standing pensively in front of his room, her lips red from her presumably chewing them.

He's not sure if Maki has been avoiding him all day or if they've both just been coincidentally missing each other but this is the first time he's seen her since yesterday. He's glad that she looks okay, that she doesn't look distressed. Then again he also knows that Maki is an absolute champion at veiling her true feelings. He's just happy that she's even here. After yesterday's small argument, well, him snapping at her, he was convinced that he managed to ruin their friendship just like that.

It's a relief that Maki still likes him enough to want to talk to him.

"Harukawa! It's good to see you!"

Maki blinks before smoothing her expression into something more relaxed. "Hello, Momota."

"I haven't seen you all day!" Kaito quickly backtracks as soon as the words leave his mouth. "Which is *my* bad, of course. I've just been super busy trying to help everyone that--"

"You don't need to explain yourself. I know you have your hands full at the moment," Maki reassures him before hesitating. "Hey...are you free now though?"

"I...should be," Kaito says slowly. He doesn't think he has anything he should be doing right now. He could go back outside and argue with Angie but even the thought of doing that leaves him feeling drained. "Yeah, I'm *definitely* free right now."

"Ah..." Maki pauses before fiddling with a couple of strands of her hair. Huh. Is she nervous about

something? “Do you...want to train with me outside?” She clears her throat. “We used to train outside a lot during the first game. You, me and Saihara. I know that you don’t remember doing so but I just thought...”

There’s something about the look on Maki’s face that fills Kaito with an unexpected warmth. After Maki’s spiel about how assassins work better off alone the other day, having her invite him to train with her is an unexpected but *extremely* welcome surprise. He grins before he can stop himself and slams his fists together so harshly that he’s surprised that his bones don’t start shaking.

“Hell yeah I’m up for some training! What did we used to do? Push ups? Sit ups? Even better, did we do any star jumps?”

“We did...most of those things,” Maki says. “I don’t remember doing any star jumps though.”

“*What?!* ” How did they not do star jumps? Star jumps are the best form of exercise because of their name alone! Fuck, Kaito is going to have to remedy this *tragedy* as quickly as possible. “Then what are we doing standing around? We need to start doing them right away-”

“There’s something I need to say first,” Maki abruptly says before he can sprint outside. Kaito raises an eyebrow as Maki sucks in a sharp breath before sighing quietly. “I...still don’t remember what exactly happened but I’m sorry that I hurt you. I’m...I’m trying to remember what I did but everything is just a blur-”

“Hold on a second there! Why are you apologising?” Kaito asks, tilting his head to the side. “You were sick. You can’t blame yourself for what happened. If there’s anyone to blame, it’s Shirogane.”

“Shirogane didn’t stick a knife through your hand though. I did.” Maki tries to subtly look at his hand without him noticing but Kaito does regardless. “I could’ve killed you-”

“But you didn’t and that’s all that matters,” Kaito says. “You had the perfect opportunity to take me out but you didn’t.” He lets out a loud sigh. “You don’t have to apologise to me but...if you *really* do feel the need to say sorry, you should apologise to Ouma. He’s the one you really went after.”

“...I don’t remember going after him either,” Maki murmurs quietly, her expression hardening into something more frosty. Kaito chalks up the look on her face to her not being able to remember anything.

“Yeah, well, it’s like I said. You were sick,” Kaito reassures her. “I mean, I don’t know *how* you got sick but what’s done is done. At least I didn’t have to stand around with a hole in my hand for too long though! The wall was fixed pretty much only a couple of minutes after you, uh, stabbed me so...yeah...”

“Still. I’m sorry that you ended up hurt,” Maki says. “I’m glad that you didn’t have to suffer for too long.”

Kaito smiles at her, unable to think of a response that won’t fuel the conversation to go around in circles. At this rate she’s going to keep apologising and he’s going to keep telling her that she has nothing to worry about. “Hey, we should probably start our training soon. I think I’m going to have a lot of early mornings from now on so I want to get as much sleep as I can.”

“If training at night is a problem then we can always-”

“If we used to train at night then we should continue that tradition, right?” Kaito presses as he steps

out of his room. “After all, you don’t get to see the stars during the day! Training under a starry night sky is the best sort of training, you know?”

Maki’s mouth twitches into a smile. “Yeah, you’re right.”

“Then let’s get going, sidekick!”

“Sidekick?” Maki abruptly stops as they reach the bottom of the stairs, causing Kaito to have to look over his shoulder to check that she’s still following him.

“Huh? What’s wrong?”

“I...didn’t know you remembered that I’m your sidekick,” Maki admits, her voice so soft that Kaito almost doesn’t hear her.

“Well I asked Hoshi today about who my sidekicks are and he included you!” Kaito tells her.

Maki’s expression goes back to being unreadable. “Oh.”

“Well c’mon, sidekick! We have training to do!”

Once Kaito is outside he straight away searches for the best place to exercise. The grass seems like the best contender since it’s the most comfortable. As Kaito makes a beeline over towards it, Maki wavers.

“Actually, you can go ahead and start without me,” Maki suddenly says. “I need to do something first.”

Kaito watches as Maki walks past him. “Huh? Where are you going?”

“I’ll just be a minute.”

The astronaut suppresses a pout as he’s left standing on his own. As he waits for Maki to come back, he takes off his jacket and folds it up neatly, leaving it on top of the picnic table under the gazebo. He then moves onto doing some stretches since Maki still isn’t back.

As he stretches, he sneaks a glance up at the sky. Something pisses him off about the fact that the stars he’s looking at are fake, a cold comfort. The more he thinks about it, the more he realises he should’ve known from the start that something wasn’t right about this academy. All the stars are out of line, like they’re a scattered puzzle.

Maki eventually returns and to Kaito’s surprise she’s dragging Shuichi along by the wrist towards him. The detective looks flustered and although Kaito can’t hear him, he can definitely see that Shuichi is bickering with Maki, most likely wanting her to let him go. The moment he spots Kaito however Shuichi falls silent.

“You can argue with Angie later,” Maki tells Shuichi as she lets him go. Ah, Kaito *definitely* has missed a part of their conversation then. “For now, you’re going to do some training with us.”

“But I really need to-”

“You really need to stop being stupid and stretch before we start,” Maki tells him. “Haven’t you missed doing this?”

Shuichi blinks owlishly and for one worrying moment, he looks incredibly lost. He looks at Kaito and Maki like they’re playing a cruel trick on him before averting his gaze to the floor. “...of course

I have.”

“Then stop standing around like an idiot and start stretching.”

Kaito watches quietly as Shuichi slips his jacket off without a word and places it next to his own. He notices Maki start to stretch next to him from the corner of his eye, a stony look on her face. He can't tell if she's the sort of person who spaces out as they warm up or if something is bothering her. He thinks it might be the latter.

Shuichi hesitates before stretching on Kaito's other side, sneaking glances at Maki as if trying to copy her without her noticing. Kaito has the feeling Shuichi might not know how to properly warm up without some guidance.

Because Kaito has been so busy and Shuichi has been so occupied all day, the astronaut hasn't exactly had the chance to confront him over what Ryoma had told him this morning. Of course Kaito wants to give Shuichi the benefit of the doubt simply because he's his sidekick. It also feels wrong however to not have a word with Shuichi about everything either. He's not entirely sure how heavy a burden Shuichi is carrying on his shoulders but from the sounds of it, Shuichi seems to be struggling a lot more than he's letting on and Kaito has a feeling the detective has no intention of sharing that weight.

Since Shuichi doesn't say anything, Kaito decides that he's going to have to be the one to get the ball rolling. “Hey, sidekick.”

Shuichi blinks before realising that Kaito is talking to him. “Oh, um, hi, Momota.”

“You doing okay?”

“I'm...fine,” Shuichi says between stretches. He casts a worried glance towards where the exit is. “I...really need Angie to get out of the way. She knows I need to leave tonight. They're...they're expecting me soon and if I don't show up then who knows what-”

“Woah, woah, *woah!*” Kaito stops stretching so he can clasp a hand down on the detective's shoulder. “Relax, okay? You don't owe Team Danganronpa shit, got it? So what if you're a little late? Maybe it's about time you make them wait!”

“But that's all I've been doing,” Shuichi stresses. “If I screw the negotiations up then-”

“Have you considered that they're simply messing you around?” Maki suddenly suggests. She's continuing to look straight ahead, a focussed look on her face as she stretches her arms. “Or that they're trying to make you worry so you eventually slip up?”

Shuichi stares at her silently, a slight tremble in his hands. Kaito hates how tired the detective looks, like how if even the slightest breeze hits him then he'll fall like a house of cards.

What the hell has he been dealing with to end up looking like this?

A tense silence follows Maki's words. It seems his sidekicks are both at a standstill. Maki continues to stretch whilst Shuichi sluggishly copies, both of them staring dead ahead at things Kaito knows he can't see. He quickly realises that he's stretching even slower than Shuichi and instantly fixes this because he doesn't want to be the one to slow the group down.

Of course Maki finishes first, her arms crossed tightly as she waits for both Kaito and Shuichi to finish. It finally clicks that Maki isn't exactly the most sociable person as she waits without saying a word, a stoic expression on her face. Kaito supposes it's nice of her to wait at least.

“How about we start with some press ups first?” Kaito suggests the moment he finishes. “Let’s say...fifty?”

“*Fifty?*” Shuichi squeaks, instantly letting his arms flop to his sides. “But that’ll take too long-”

“I think fifty is perfect,” Maki says and drops to the floor straight away, readjusting her sleeves ever so slightly so that they’re pushed above her elbows.

Shuichi, however, still seems reluctant to start. “I don’t think I can do-”

“If you have the energy to complain then you have the energy to do them,” Maki points out as she pushes herself up and down at an impressive speed. “And the sooner you get them over and done with, the sooner you can go back to arguing with Angie.”

“C’mon, sidekick! We can’t let Harukawa show us up too quickly either!” Kaito adds as he pulls Shuichi to the floor alongside him. Kaito swallows as he realises that Maki is already ten push ups in and hopes he can get through the exercises without bruising his pride. He starts his own set as soon as possible.

Fifty push ups is probably asking for a little too much from someone who isn’t used to exercising regularly like Shuichi but Kaito is curious to see how far the detective will go. Shuichi’s lips thin before he finally starts doing his own push ups.

Kaito hears Maki mumbling what number she’s at under her breath. She’s somehow already halfway through her set. Kaito tries to go just a little faster.

The astronaut has always liked exercise but there’s something different about training with his two sidekicks, something he just can’t explain. A part of him is having fun. He likes that he can use his frustration to fuel his motivation to exercise. He can feel all of his disappointment regarding his shitty day start to wash away.

The other part of him feels...frustrated. Frustrated that he can’t remember exercising with his sidekicks. Frustrated that he left them alone. Frustrated that despite being Kaito’s sidekick, Shuichi is struggling to the point of working himself into a frenzy.

How badly did he fuck up for one of his sidekicks to look so...lost?

Kaito forces his way through his last ten push ups, his arms burning. Maki has once again left him and Shuichi in the dust. She’s stretched out on the floor, glancing up at the stars as she waits for the two boys to finish. Again.

“I think we should do one hundred star jumps once you’re both finished,” Maki says as Kaito nears his final three push ups.

Shuichi instantly flops onto the floor and shoots Maki a betrayed look. “What?!”

Maki had looked as cool as a cucumber once she had finished her push ups. Kaito feels a trickle of sweat run down his face as he reaches his last one. “We...we can do those after...after a little break.”

“We still need to wait for Saihara to finish anyway,” Maki points out.

Shuichi looks surprisingly frustrated by her words. “You said once I was done with these that-”

“Why are you so desperate to leave?” Maki suddenly asks, a hint of impatience in her tone. “Aren’t

you glad that we're able to train together again?"

"Of course I am-"

"If you were happy then you wouldn't be trying to leave at the earliest convenience," Maki bitterly points out. "You should be grateful that all three of us are able to do this again."

"I-I *am* grateful!" Shuichi insists. He's stopped doing his push ups completely. "And I'm...I'm really happy that we have the opportunity to exercise again. I've really missed this! It's just..."

"You care more about stopping Danganronpa," Maki says.

"That's because ending Danganronpa is my number one priority!" Shuichi argues. "You're being unfair. You know I've missed doing this as much as you but I can't just throw away all the progress I've made just to indulge in something we can all do once I'm done-"

"That's not the point. We won't be able to exercise *here* once everything is over and done with," Maki responds. "I *like* training here-"

"It's...it's nostalgic training here, I'll admit it," Shuichi says. "But this school...even where we are now is a part of the Danganronpa world. Wouldn't you rather find somewhere new to train? Somewhere that isn't...tainted?"

Maki's expression suddenly turns dark. "Are you saying I'm wrong for enjoying this?"

Shuichi shakes his head and lets out a shaky sigh. "I'm not saying that at all. I just...have different priorities now. Of course I cherish the times I trained with you and Momota but..."

"Hey, if you're upset that we're training during the night then we can always train during the day instead," Kaito quickly suggests. A sickly feeling settles in his lungs as he watches his two sidekicks bicker.

"It's not that," Shuichi says. "I still want to train with you both, it's just...I want it to be because we *want* to train, not because it's what we *think* we should be doing."

Maki's eyes go wide. "Excuse me?"

"We...only started training because that's what the script wanted us to do," Shuichi says weakly, his voice getting quieter and quieter as Maki stares at him incredulously. "And, um, I think it's okay that you still want to continue that tradition, I do too. But I can't jeopardise everything I've worked for just to follow a routine that...that we've outgrown the need for-"

Maki stands up abruptly and before Kaito can stop her, she storms towards the dormitory.

"Harukawa? Where are you going?!"

She doesn't answer him and Kaito frowns as he watches her go into her room, slamming her broken bedroom door loudly. He looks at Shuichi, who is nervously wringing his hands.

Shuichi grimaces. "Oh. I didn't mean to upset her."

Kaito helplessly tries to figure out if he should go after Maki or stay with Shuichi. He doesn't really understand what's going on and feels like he's just witnessed an argument that should've been private. "I know."

Shuichi goes to run a hand through his hair and jumps as he knocks his hat onto the floor. "...ah, I

didn't realise I was wearing this."

The detective picks it up and sweeps some dirt from it, staring at the hat with a complicated look on his face. Kaito watches quietly, knowing that he needs to say something but he isn't sure what. "Hey, what did you mean when you said you've outgrown the need to train?"

"I...think I worded that badly. Really badly," Shuichi admits. "You made us train to make us stronger and...I feel like I'm already at my strongest thanks to you. Of course exercising with you is something I still want to do but...I feel like if we start following the same routine that we were scripted to do we'd just be going backwards. I want to train because I want to, not because I think I should."

"Would you really be going backwards though?" Kaito asks. "Everyone always has room to grow, even when they think they've done as much as they can. And..." Kaito puts a fisted hand on his hip as he looks Shuichi dead in the eyes. "If I'm being completely honest, you don't look like someone who has reached their full potential."

Shuichi freezes and all Kaito can see is hurt in his eyes. "...huh?"

"Tell me, why did I get you to train in the first place? Why did I make you my sidekick?"

"It...was after Akamatsu died," Shuichi says, squeezing his hat tightly in his hands. "You took me outside and made me exercise with you. You told me that...we were training for my sake. You..."

Kaito watches passively as Shuichi shakes his head.

"It doesn't matter-"

"I think it does," Kaito says. "And it's your responsibility as my sidekick to fill me in on things I don't remember, got it? I'm trusting you to help me out here."

Shuichi's hat crinkles as his grip tightens. "...you helped me figure out what my enemy was."

"Which was?"

"I...was scared of revealing the truth," Shuichi says. "I was scared of the pain I'd cause if I ever revealed the truth." His eyebrows furrow as he stops looking at the floor and back up at Kaito. "But I'm not scared of that anymore-"

"Really?" Kaito abruptly interrupts.

"I...don't think I understand what you're getting at," Shuichi responds. "Being scared to reveal the truth isn't my enemy anymore-"

"Then why did you keep people locked in an office without telling them why?" Kaito asks. He knows Shuichi wasn't expecting that question since he almost drops his hat on the floor. "Listen, I get what your goal is. You want to stop Danganronpa, right? I completely support you with that goal but, fuck, why have you been trying to end it alone?"

"I..."

"Saihara, I know that you've kept people who survived in the office with little to no explanation," Kaito says. "And I know sometimes you've got to do hard things to get what you want but...I thought as my sidekick, you'd know better. I know myself and I know I wouldn't have encouraged you to do something so unintentionally cruel. What made you think trying to end Danganronpa

alone was a good idea?”

“Kiibo has been helping me-”

“With what? Keeping people in the office or ending Danganronpa?”

Shuichi blinks before swallowing heavily. “I didn’t have much of a choice, Momota. Leaving the office really isn’t an option. I didn’t keep people in there because I wanted to trap them, I was trying to keep them *safe*. The moment a member of staff realises everyone is awake, they’ll force us out and wipe our memories. If that happens then Danganronpa is just going to continue.”

Kaito scratches the back of his head as he looks up at the sky quietly. He is well and truly struggling to think of a solution for all of this. If circumstances were different then he’d think fuck it and yell at Team Danganronpa himself but the situation seems a lot more fragile than that. He hates that this isn’t something he can fix through sheer willpower.

“I...I never wanted anyone to suffer because of my choices,” Shuichi murmurs, hugging his hat close to his chest. “And I didn’t mean to upset everyone. I...I just want to put a stop to everything so no one else has to go through something like this again.”

Shuichi suddenly looks exhausted.

“What I’m trying to accomplish...it’s not impossible, right?” Shuichi asks him. “I can make the impossible possible, right?”

“The impossible is possible! All you gotta do is make it so!”

The words echo around Kaito’s head. The words he cherishes so dearly, the words he recites to comfort people...suddenly sound completely wrong.

However, as Shuichi stands there gripping his hat like a lifeline, Kaito feels like if he turns his back on those words now then they’ll become meaningless and he won’t let that happen.

“You’re my sidekick, I believe you can do anything!” Kaito answers and squeezes the detective’s shoulder carefully. “Just...leave everyone else to me, okay? I think you’ve accidentally upset a couple people but I’ll talk to them. You just focus on ending Danganronpa, got it?”

“...I really don’t deserve you, Momota.”

“Don’t say that!” Kaito shakes Shuichi’s shoulder playfully. “You’re my sidekick and that means I’ll never turn my back on you! Your mistakes are my mistakes.” He smiles tightly. “But I’m gonna be brutally honest with you, bro. I don’t think Angie is moving anytime soon so I think you’re definitely going to miss your negotiation tonight.”

“But I can’t-”

“Before you panic, try and see this as a win,” Kaito says. “Remember what I said before? Maybe it’s about time you make them wait for once. If you keep running every time they ask for you then they’re gonna think they can control you. You can’t let them think that. Just...take tonight on the chin and get some rest. You look exhausted.”

Shuichi looks like he wants to argue but to Kaito’s relief, the detective simply nods and heads towards the dormitory, running a hand down his face. Once Shuichi leaves, Kaito is completely on his own.

...and since he's alone, Kaito finally drops his smile.

Why can't everything be simple? Why does it feel like everything is getting messier and messier every day? It feels like he's making no progress, that he's going backwards instead of forward. He can see the goal he's reaching for but it's like he has to run through drying cement to get to it.

He's not dense, he knows things won't just magically fall into place. He just...wishes things could be a *little* easier. He wishes he could snap his fingers and make everyone happy, make everyone feel like they're able to push through everything.

After tonight, he thinks training might be off the table just for now. He could frog-march everyone outside and tell them to do sit ups until they're too tired to worry but...he doesn't think that would be the most tactful idea right now. Still, he needs to do something. *Anything*. He needs to cheer everyone up and keep them going. What can he do to make everyone smile that he can do inside of the simulation?

He needs to think of something that will appeal to everyone, something that'll take everyone's minds off everything. Something like...

...a party?

They're light-hearted and fun, right? Kaito nods to himself as he approves of his own plan. No one has any reason *not* to attend.

Well, apart from Kokichi if he doesn't enter the simulation soon. Damn it, what the hell is taking him so long?

Actually, hold on a second. Kaito might not be able to see Kokichi right now but shouldn't Kokichi be able to see him? Kaede had told him over breakfast about how there's a room full of monitors in the office that shows what's going on inside of the simulation.

Kaito pauses and he's suddenly glad that he's alone because he feels a little stupid as he starts to wave his arms in the air, looking up at the glass wall eagerly. "Hey Ouma! Can you hear me? Heeey!"

He waves his hands back and forth a couple of times, continuing to shout his name for a couple of minutes for good measure.

"I don't know why you haven't come back yet but you should as soon as possible! Heeey, you *are* listening, right? Get your ass back in here so you can come to my party, got it?"

Kaito stops, breathless from waving his arms so much. Man, he hopes he didn't just make himself look like an idiot for no reason.

He huffs, placing his hands on his knees as he tries to catch his breath. He looks back up at the glass wall once more. "It's...it's gonna be the best party ever..." Once Kaito feels like he finally isn't going to pass out from a lack of oxygen, he sighs quietly. "G'night, dude."

Kaito shuffles back to his bedroom with high hopes for his plan. Everyone enjoys a good party, right? If this doesn't boost morale then he doesn't know what will.

—

"Ouma...Ouma, I think it's about time you wake up."

Kokichi blinks slowly, a sleepy fog disrupting his vision. It takes him a moment to realise that Kiibo is kneeling down next to him, a bottle of water in one hand and a cherry flavoured breakfast bar in the other. He tentatively pulls himself up into a sitting position and is surprised as he causes a blanket to slip down his shoulders and pool into his lap.

He looks around lethargically and quickly realises that he must've fallen asleep on the floor at some point. He's still surrounded by documents and paperwork, although some of them have been sorted into neat piles. Kiibo must've been busy whilst he was asleep.

Speaking of, he's not entirely sure *when* he fell asleep. One moment he's flicking through a script for the third time and the next he's waking up several hours later. He rubs his eyes as he sneaks a peek out of the window. It's dark outside, although it had also been dark when he first woke up in the office too. How long has he been asleep for?

Either Kiibo has the ability to read minds or probably expected Kokichi to be confused since he says, "you fell asleep whilst you were reading and have slept through the entire day. There's, ah, no beds here so I could only give you a blanket." Oh, so that's where the blanket came from.

Kokichi looks at the mess of paperwork he's still in the middle of. It feels like his brain is lagging behind, like he should be in the process of overreacting about everything he read about last night. Instead, he watches as Kiibo tries to press a water bottle into his hands. It doesn't click that he needs to actually grab it.

He's not sure why but instead of waking up feeling refreshed, he feels like he hasn't slept at all. It feels like tendrils of ice are wrapped around his lungs, like there's an immovable lump in his throat.

There's something about waking up in an office and not being able to leave that really pisses him off. There's something about being told that he's fictional that makes him want to scream bloody murder. There's something about being told that everything he knows is a *lie* vexes him so much that he feels like he's being fuelled by anger alone.

It bothers him that no matter how much he looked last night, he couldn't find a *single* contradiction to suggest that the ugly situation he's in is nothing but a lie. It makes him feel sick that despite searching through file after file, that despite tearing through everything available, that despite searching top to bottom and reading every single fucking word he could find, he couldn't find a single thing. Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

For one horrifying moment he wishes he never left the school at all. He almost wishes that he could go back to being ignorant. He can't remember how he ended up in the office but he wishes he could turn back time and wake up in the classroom again alongside Kiibo. No, he wishes he could wake up *anywhere* else but here.

See, it's things like this that makes Kokichi more fond of lies than the truth. The truth is always something horrible and ugly and unwanted and exhausting. It's rarely ever anything good. At least lies are infinite and safe and...

...temporary.

It takes a moment for him to realise that Kiibo has his own hands wrapped around his, helping him hold his water bottle. Kiibo carefully removes his hands and by some miracle, Kokichi doesn't drop the bottle.

He won't admit it out loud but Kokichi is well and truly at a loss. It's like he's playing a game and

all of the rules have been changed and he's the only one who hasn't been told what the new ones are. It's his pride as a leader, as the Ultimate Supreme Leader, that forces him to keep his expression neutral, to not show any weakness. He doesn't want Kiibo's pity, he doesn't want anyone's pity.

He's not entirely sure what he wants or how to proceed. He can't leave, Kiibo has made that very clear. He said that Shuichi is going to fix everything. He said that Shuichi, the guy who constantly looks like he's on the verge of having a spectacular breakdown, is going to fix everything.

...fucking hell, they're all screwed.

"Are you going to have a drink?" Kiibo asks him, jerking him harshly from his own thoughts. "You should. It's been a while since you've had one and you need to look after yourself."

Kokichi looks down at his body, his body that looks so familiar yet so alien. He doesn't like his black hair and his brown eyes. He doesn't like that he feels so cold. He doesn't like that he always feels like he's on the cusp of falling over the moment he stands up. He doesn't like this weak body, this weak body of his that has been sealed in a pod for far too long and needs extra care so that it can keep functioning.

He opens the water bottle and takes small sips. The water tastes blissful, like heaven. He realises that he never drank anything whilst he was reading through everything, far too absorbed with trying to find a contradiction that doesn't exist. He eyes the breakfast bar but instead of feeling hungry, he goes back to feeling sick.

He doesn't know where that breakfast bar came from. He doesn't know anything about Team Danganronpa. He doesn't know if they're done with everyone yet, how far they'll go to get everyone out of the office. He was listening intently when Shuichi had explained everything, had explained how everyone can't leave the office because if they do then another killing game will happen.

For one sickly moment his mind runs wild. The water in his bottle turns into poison, the breakfast bar morphs into something sinister. As he swallows the last mouthful of water, a phantom burn stings his throat and the pain feels so real despite the fact he hasn't ever experienced guzzling poison before. Right? He almost splutters but coaxes himself out of it, instead opting to screw the lid back onto the bottle tightly and pushing it to the side.

"I'm not hungry," Kokichi says. It's not a lie either, even though Kiibo looks like he thinks otherwise.

"You have to be-"

"I'm not."

Kiibo pauses and examines both Kokichi and the breakfast bar slowly. "You don't think that it's poisoned, do you?"

If Kokichi still had water in his mouth then he would've spat it out. Fuck, maybe Kiibo *does* know how to read minds.

"Why'd you ask that, Kiiboy?"

"...because you refused to eat much during that last game because you thought everything was poisoned," Kiibo says. "And you thought that because of what happened in the game before that."

“...eh?”

“For now, I don’t think you need to know all the details but please understand that as your friend, I would never offer you something that I know would hurt you,” Kiibo tells him. “Unfortunately, I am going to have to insist that you eat something though, otherwise I think you should go back into the simulation so the pod can take proper care of you.”

Even just thinking about going back in makes him shudder. He knows things aren’t going well in there, that Angie is blocking the exit and no one can get her to move. As a leader he should be doing the responsible thing of sorting everyone out himself.

He just feels so drained, like even if he fixes everything then it won’t mean anything anyway.

For a moment he pities whoever broke the wall. All that effort just to find out that they’re not even real and that they’re still trapped. What a fucking joke.

He suddenly finds that there’s a lump in his throat.

Kiibo tries to offer him the breakfast bar again but he ends up swatting it out of the robot’s hand. He’s not sure why he suddenly feels more pissed off than before but he feels like he’s on the verge of tears and he’s not about to let Kiibo see that.

“H-Hey, why did you do that-”

“Because I don’t want it!” Kokichi very quickly realises that he’s not just on about the breakfast bar. He doesn’t want to be in this office. He doesn’t want to be trapped. He doesn’t want to accept the truth. He doesn’t want to sit around and waste his time waiting for someone to end something that the entire world adores. He wants to close his eyes and wake up in his own bed at home. He wants someone to pinch him so hard that he wakes up from this hellish nightmare.

Kiibo pulls his hand away and Kokichi expects him to sigh impatiently. Kiibo instead picks up the breakfast bar and places it on Kokichi’s blanket instead, not offering him it but making it clear that it’s there.

Kokichi is pissed off. He’s *so* pissed off at so many different things. He’s pissed off at the truth. He’s pissed off that he’s in this situation in the first place. He’s pissed off that this isn’t just another lie he can play with like putty in his hands. He’s pissed off because he feels trapped and cornered and stuck, that his back is pretty much pressed up against the wall.

He’s pissed off that he has nowhere to channel his anger, that it’s festering and growing and causing any hope that all of this is just one sick joke to decompose into nothing. He’s pissed off that there’s people out there who want him to suffer. He’s pissed off that there’s people who are accommodating that desire.

He’s pissed off that when he goes to look at himself in a mirror, when he catches his reflection passing a window, all he’s going to see is black hair and brown eyes when they’re supposed to be purple. He’s pissed off that instead of looking at himself, he’s instead going to see a weak and pathetic and spineless stranger who caused him to be in this mess.

He hates his black hair and he hates his honey brown eyes. For one maddening moment, he indulges in the idea that all of this is actually a lie, that someone dyed his hair whilst he was asleep and placed contacts over his eyes. He knows that it’s nothing more than a fantasy, he hasn’t seen any hair dye in the office or any contact lenses. That doesn’t stop him from hoping for one manic second that maybe if he just checks to see if he’s actually wearing coloured contact lenses, then

everything will fix itself.

Kokichi tries to remove a contact lens that doesn't exist. He ends up simply prodding his eye.

"What are you *doing*?!" Kiibo instantly snatches his hand before checking his eye, which is *really* starting to sting. The robot narrows his eyes before sighing. "It doesn't look like you've done any actual damage. However, what on earth possessed you to do that? I know for a fact that eyes are extremely delicate and..."

Kiibo realises Kokichi doesn't exactly care about how fragile eyeballs are and drops the subject. The robot looks around the room and at all the documents.

"Let's move you somewhere else," Kiibo suggests. He probably wants him out of the mess of paperwork so he doesn't have to look at it, so he doesn't have to be surrounded by the truth that cruelly mocks him.

The robot guides him to the monitor room and sits him down on a chair. Kokichi looks around. Mostly everyone is in bed. Angie is still in an Exisal. Kaito is outside and...

"Is he having a stroke?" Kokichi murmurs, focusing his attention on a monitor showing Kaito flailing his arms around.

Kiibo looks at him strangely before taking a peek at the monitor Kokichi is staring at. The robot blinks. "Is he...trying to talk to communicate with us?"

The robot reaches under the monitor and clicks what presumably is a volume button. Kaito's obnoxious voice instantly fills the room. "*Get your ass back in here so you can come to my party, got it?*"

"What the..." Kokichi stares incredulously at the screen as Kaito huffs at the grass, catching his breath. Did he just hear him right? Kaito is throwing...a party?

Kiibo smiles, to Kokichi's surprise. "It's nice to see that he's still himself despite everything."

"He's...he's throwing a fucking party even though we are literally in hell," Kokichi stammers. "Why are you smiling?"

"Because. It's good to see that he hasn't been destroyed by the truth," Kiibo says. "If I had to pick someone who I thought would be the least affected by all this, I would've picked Momota in the first place."

"...either he's too stupid to realise that he's in the literal worst scenario possible or he's delusional," Kokichi grumbles.

"Don't be so mean. He's clearly trying to look after everyone."

"By throwing a stupid party-"

"Maybe doing something *normal* might make everyone feel better," Kiibo suggests. "It might make you feel better too."

"You want me to go back into the simulation just to go to Momota's party?" Kokichi spins the chair around so he can fully stare at Kiibo like he's just been crowned the biggest idiot on the planet. "Are you glitching or something? What sort of stupid-"

“Of course you don’t have to go if you don’t want to,” Kiibo says. “But there’s nothing much for you to do in the office and I’m worried that your mental health will deteriorate if you continue to insist on staying here. I’ll try my best to support you but...” Kiibo looks over at the monitors again. “You have people waiting for you, people who want to know that you’re okay.”

Wow, that sounds like a pretty big lie. Kokichi eyes Kiibo dubiously. “Is that so?”

It’s annoying. It would feel like one big slap in the face if he goes back in now. Leaving the school had been the end goal. Going back just to attend a party feels like the stupidest thing he’s ever heard.

Then again, his only alternative option is to sit in a tiny office with nothing but his own thoughts for company.

Kokichi watches as Kaito heads to bed and narrows his eyes. For someone who is trying so hard to cheer everyone up, there’s a huge frown on the astronaut’s face. Huh. How awfully ironic. It almost makes him feel bad.

That’s a lie. He feels sick that the most optimistic person in the group looks like they’re trying to fool themselves into thinking everything will be okay.

He doesn’t know why but he hopes that he’s just seeing things, that his sore eye caused him to mistake a smile for a frown.

...he knows what he saw.

Chapter End Notes

I don't plan to have every chapter from now on to have all three POVs in it at once but there is going to be a lot of POV jumping in this loop between Kaito, Kaede and Kokichi. That being said, I want to make it clear that Kaito is still the main character for this loop!

Final Loop - Chapter 2 Part 3

Chapter Notes

I wrote a slightly self indulgent chapter for my birthday lol, dw, it's still relevant :)

Anyway, I have a couple of things I want to talk about, which I'm going to do in the bottom notes.

Thank you all for reading and thanks to everyone who left a comment on the previous chapter, it really means a lot!

I hope you all enjoy my writing!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You want to...throw a *party*?”

Kaito knows he shouldn't be surprised that Kirumi looks so baffled. She tilts her head to the side with a crease between her brows, looking at Kaito like he's just said something mind blowing.

She's not the only person. Gonta looks a little perplexed, although when Kaito had first brought up the idea of throwing a party he seemed more excited than against it. Kiibo is currently turning himself on and off continuously, something he does when he's struggling with what to say.

“Yeah, I think it's a pretty good idea,” Kaito responds eagerly, pumping one of his fists. “Everyone loves a good party, right? I'm not dense, I know things are shitty right now, which is why I want to do something that'll lift morale. No one is ever sad at a party!”

“Gonta never been to party before,” Gonta admits. “But he's heard that they're fun! Everyone so sad right now, Gonta thinks Momota might be right that we need to do something to make everyone happy again!”

“But won't it be...” Kirumi looks apologetic as she turns her attention to Kaito. “Rather out of touch to throw a party considering what is going on at the moment? I understand what you're trying to do, Momota. However, I'm not sure if everyone will agree to even go. The situation we're in is extremely dire. Just look around. Hardly anyone has shown up for breakfast.”

She's right, there's only the four of them in the room. Everyone else is currently still in bed or actively avoiding the dining room, even though it's the unspoken meeting place for everyone to go to daily.

“Which is *why* we need to do something to get everyone out and about,” Kaito presses, a twinge of impatience seeping into his voice. “I've already promised that I'd look after everyone here and a man never goes back on his word!”

Kirumi's eyes shift from Kaito to around the room. “But are you truly sure throwing a party is the right thing to do? It won't just be everyone else's morale that'll take a hit if it doesn't work out. I'm worried you'll upset yourself if no one can bring themselves to come.”

Kaito lets out a startled laugh. Him? Upset? *No way!* He slams his fists together with a sparkly

grin. “Then I’ll just have to throw a party so awesome that everyone will have no choice but to come! You’re worrying too much, sidekick! Besides, I have to do *something*! Can’t just sit back and let everyone wallow!”

“That is true,” Kiibo suddenly speaks up, his eyes clear. “Whilst I can’t exactly comprehend how Momota came to the conclusion that throwing a party is the best idea to work with, what other choice do we have? Giving everyone something to look forward to might be the best thing we can do right now.”

“See! Kiibo agrees!” Kaito squeezes Kiibo’s shoulder excitedly. “Sometimes you gotta think outside the box! Yeah, throwing a party might be a risky idea but you gotta take risks if you want to succeed! You never got anywhere by playing safe all the time.”

Kirumi’s lips thin as she examines Gonta’s hopeful smile before moving onto Kaito’s encouraging grin. “I see. Very well then, if you truly think throwing a party will help the group then I shall aid you the best I can-”

“I *knew* you’d understand!” Kaito barely manages to hold himself back from spinning her around excitedly. He feels restless energy zipping up and down every limb and bone as well as an endless itch to get started. “So I’m thinking that we prepare everything today and have the party tomorrow! Gives us time to set everything up and get everyone excited, right?”

“A little ambiguous but certainly doable,” Kirumi murmurs into her hand. “Just how big do you want this party to be?”

Kaito’s eyes shine like a clear starry night. “The bigger, the better.”

“So we actually having party?” Gonta’s smile is so infectious that even Kirumi has a small one on her face, although there is still a calculating look in her eyes as she tries to figure out how much work she needs to do. When Kaito nods, Gonta cheers joyfully. “Can Gonta help? Gonta hasn’t been or thrown party before! Also, Gonta wants to do everything he can to help group! He doesn’t really understand what’s going on but everyone is upset, right? Gonta doesn’t like seeing people upset, even if he doesn’t know people all that well.”

“I suppose having a party will also help everyone get to know each other a little better,” Kiibo adds. “Or at the very least allow everyone to catch up. I know there’s some people here who would appreciate the time to be able to sit down and talk.”

Kaito can’t help but feel proud about his idea. See, he knew his plan wasn’t stupid! Okay sure, he wasn’t *exactly* thinking about the logical side of things, he simply thought throwing a party would make everyone happy. However, the more he thinks about it, the more he’s glad he’s accidentally stumbled on an excellent idea. Even Kirumi can’t be dubious now that Kiibo has made a brilliant point.

“Gonta wants a chance to talk to everyone,” Gonta agrees. “He’s not been able to talk much to people ever since he woke up here. Everyone either been too sad or busy to talk. Lots has happened over the last couple of days. Gonta thinks it would be nice if we could all just get along whilst we wait for Saihara to fix everything.”

“Maybe the party will be enough to convince Angie to leave the Exisal too,” Kiibo says. “She’s been in there for a while now and I doubt sitting in there all day is doing her any good.”

“It would be nice to get her out,” Kirumi agrees. “But not only for the fact that the exit will be accessible again. I highly doubt she blocked the exit for no reason and I’m worried about her. I fear

the longer she refuses to move, the worse she's going to become. Neither her mental health nor physical health must be doing okay right now."

"I think we've all tried talking to her," Kaito murmurs, scratching the back of his head as a thoughtful look takes over his face. "It's just...tricky, you know? She won't even listen to me and that says a lot."

Kirumi raises a slight eyebrow before clearing her throat. "It's fair to say that she's scared but won't admit it. The truth that has been revealed to us isn't exactly pleasant."

"Then party will cheer Angie up, right?" Gonta says. "Angie always smiling before she got into Exisal so Gonta knows she's a happy person deep down. Maybe party will help her find her smile again?"

"At the very least it will give her an incentive to leave," Kiibo responds.

"Which is why it's up to us to throw the best fucking party ever!" Kaito tells the room. He looks around at his small group of helpers, well, who he has *decided* are his helpers. He's sure Gonta and Kiibo will be ecstatic to help him. "We're gonna go all out, got it? In fact, we're gonna throw the best party in the entire *universe*! That'll give everyone a reason to leave their rooms!"

"But what about Shirogane?" Kiibo asks. "We can't just ignore her."

"And she might do something once we've all lowered our guards," Kirumi points out. "Someone should keep an eye on her just in case."

"And have someone miss out on the party?" Kaito frowns before rubbing his goatee. "Well she's refusing to leave her room, right? As long as she doesn't find out about it then everything will be fine!"

"So...Shirogane not allowed to come to party?" Gonta looks a little surprised by the revelation.

"Well of course not, we're throwing one to cheer everyone up," Kaito says. "Her being there will just be asking for trouble. The further she stays away, the better."

"But...Shirogane person too. She's also been locking herself in bedroom."

"Shirogane isn't a nice person," Kaito tells him. "She's the reason we're all in the simulation in the first place, remember? Think of her as a villain. It's not fair to expect a hero and his sidekicks to share a stage with a villain, right?"

"Oh, that...makes sense," Gonta says quietly. "But still, kind of sad Shirogane has to be a villain. Can't villains become good people?"

"I'm not sure if the situation with Shirogane is as simple as that," Kirumi tells Gonta gently. "She has proven that she's a threat and it's safer if we treat her as one. That doesn't mean we have to stop treating her as a person though. I'm presuming we'll be making food for the party, correct? I'll make sure to deliver her some before it starts so she doesn't miss out entirely."

"Do you think she deserves that?" Kaito asks doubtfully. It's an uncomfortable situation. Yes, Tsumugi is still a person but she's a horrible one. From the sounds of it, she's never going to change and wants nothing more than to sow despair. "I mean, you can do what you want. I'm not letting her ruin everything though. At least bring her something afterwards so she doesn't know we're having one. The less risk of her ruining everything, the better."

“Very well then.”

Desperate to move the conversation from Tsumugi, Kaito quickly switches the topic to something else. There’s no point ruining his good mood over her anyway. If there’s one thing he’s certain about, he’s not letting Tsumugi do any more damage to the group. She’s already had her fun with the stupid Despair Disease and the arcade machine. “So, the party! Anyone have any good ideas where we can host it?”

“It’ll need to be somewhere spacious so there’s enough space for everyone,” Kirumi says. “So I’m not entirely sure any of the classrooms will do.”

“Um, how about the swimming pool? We could have a pool party,” Gonta suggests. “Gonta strong swimmer so he can make sure everyone safe too! Like lifeguard!”

Kiibo pulls a face. “I can’t swim so I wouldn’t actually be able to do much. Whilst I am waterproof, the last time I ever went into deep water, I ended up sinking all the way to the bottom. It took my professor hours to get me out.”

“Okay, so not water,” Kaito quickly says, smiling sympathetically at Gonta, who looks a little disappointed that his idea is a no-go. “That’s fine! There’s still plenty of other choices! Like, uh…”

“It would probably be for the best if you had a look around,” Kirumi says. “That way you can figure out which room will be the best. It’s important that you pick a room that’s practical and has plenty of room. As well as that, I’d recommend picking somewhere which can be decorated easily and can host some form of entertainment. You need to be able to offer your guests something to do and as well as that, somewhere to sit.”

He won’t lie, Kaito didn’t exactly think about the finer details when figuring out he wanted to throw a party. He just pictured everyone having fun and smiling and that was enough motivation to want to set one up. Now that he has to think about all the work he has to put into setting everything up, well, he’s glad Kirumi is around to help. He knew making her his sidekick was a good idea! She’ll totally set the stage for the party so he can later blow everyone away!

He mentally thanks past Kaito for his amazing life choices.

“Well, what are we waiting for?” Kaito abruptly heads for the exit, a spring in his step and a smile on his face. When no one follows him, he starts to gesture for everyone to follow. “C’mon! The sooner we start, the better! There’s no way I’m gonna half ass my party. The more spectacular it is, the better! That way, everyone’s curiosity will be piqued so much that they’ll have no choice but to investigate!”

There’s absolutely nothing more unbreakable than a man’s curiosity. He’s pretty sure that it’s the same for women too. And robots.

Gonta stumbles after him energetically as Kirumi and Kiibo follow calmly, leaving behind a table full of piping hot food for anyone who happens to come into the dining room later.

—

“You know, I’ve actually kind of missed these bedrooms.”

Kaede peers around Rantaro’s bedroom as she makes herself comfortable on his couch. Amusingly enough, her bedroom door is still missing despite how long it’s been since Gonta ripped it from its hinges all those loops ago. Kaede’s glad that she can reminisce about that moment fondly. Since her room is a little too public for her liking, she had asked Rantaro last night if she could sleep in

his and he said yes.

Rantaro nods as he finishes making his bed. “Yeah, they easily beat the office floor...and the office now that I think about it.”

It’s true. Against all odds, Kaede thinks she prefers the bedrooms here to the cramped office she had spent too long in. A long time ago, sleeping in these bedrooms night after night was just a reminder of how slim their chances of escape were. Never in her wildest dreams did she think she’d ever end up back here willingly. God, she can’t believe that *leaving* this place is currently a worse option than staying.

At least Monokuma isn’t around to force everyone into killing each other. Since he isn’t around and Tsumugi has taken a backseat, she’s started to appreciate how nice the bedrooms are. Hell, even the school isn’t all that bad now that she doesn’t worry about being killed inside it. Being on high alert all the time meant she never got to appreciate the interior more. In the past, she had been so desperate to leave that the beauty surrounding her always became a low priority.

The school reminds her of a place that’s been lost in time in a way. There’s something so ethereal about the plants that have managed to squeeze between the cracks of the floorboards and dangle from the walls. A lot of them are gone now since every time someone died in a past killing game, Monokuma would clean the school up more. Still, a few out of place plants remain.

When she first stepped back into the simulation, opening her eyes inside of a cramped locker, she felt like a ghost haunting the place she died. She had worried that she was going to wake up with poison in her veins and death greeting her with open arms. She’s glad she’s fine.

Sometimes she feels like she’s an alternative reality, like she’s in some sort of lazy parallel world. She associates the school with death, she can’t help it. Even though everything is hopefully fine now, the hairs on her arms always stand up whenever she roams the school halls. She knows that Monokuma, the grim reaper of this world, is no longer a threat but it does nothing to calm her nerves.

She’s still bitterly disappointed about the outside world, about the fact that millions, maybe even *billions*, of people desperately clamour for suffering, for a battle against hope and despair. There’s also the fact she used to be one of those people. Hell, somehow she managed to earn herself the lead role of being the false protagonist and died an unspeakable death for her efforts.

It’s a...complicated situation. Her emotions feel like a jumbled up mess, like a ball of wool that’s been wrapped the completely wrong way and she doesn’t know where to start unravelling. Every choice she has to make feels world ending, like she has to gamble every time.

Well, all she can do is suck it up and keep pushing through everything whether she likes it or not. Just because the situation is complicated doesn’t mean she can’t overcome it. Now that everything’s out in the open and everyone is on the same page, it feels like things are finally taking a turn for the better. Everyone is alive, there are no killing game to compete with and...

...leaving the office will become a viable option eventually.

“Hey, you okay there?” Rantaro offers Kaede a worried smile. “You looked like you were lost in your thoughts there for a second. Do you need to talk?”

“Ah, not exactly,” Kaede admits, rubbing her cheek bashfully. “I’m just...finding everything so *weird*. It’s like, I find it strange that I’m almost *happy* to be back here but at the same time, it feels wrong, like something bad is going to happen if we don’t leave soon.”

"I getcha," Rantaro says. "I almost expected Monokuma to pop up on the monitors and yell at us to go to the gym this morning. I swear he was plaguing my dreams last night. Everything was normal but every person I saw was replaced by him. It was super strange."

"Yeah, sometimes I have dreams like those," Kaede responds before shrugging. "Probably means nothing. I heard that the last thing you think about is the thing you end up dreaming about so it's probably something to do with that."

"Guess Monokuma has been on both our minds," Rantaro says. "Oh well, at least he's not actually here."

Kaede hums in agreement. "I really don't know what I'd do if he suddenly turned up. After everything everyone has been through...I think we all deserve a break. I'm so sick of worrying all the time."

"Well if you think about it, we technically all *are* having a break," Rantaro points out. "Until Angie moves, there's nothing to do but wait."

"Do you think she's actually going to move any time soon?"

"I don't know," Rantaro sighs. "She definitely took everything harder than expected. I knew people weren't exactly going to be ecstatic by the news but, ah, I don't know. I suppose I can see why Angie isn't letting anyone leave though. It's not like we've painted the outside world in a good way. If I was in her shoes, I don't think I'd want to leave any time soon."

"You do have a point," Kaede murmurs. Thinking about Angie makes her chest hurt. She can't help it. When she thinks about Angie, she thinks about her accidentally swinging a sickle into Tenko's stomach. It happened ages ago and they're both very much alive now but the memory has left a scar that just won't heal. "It just...makes me feel sad that she's upset and there's nothing I can do about it. I know I have a complicated relationship with her but..."

Angie was the one who had unexpectedly saved Rantaro's life all those games ago, swapping her tablet with his so Tsumugi broke hers when she was trying to kill Rantaro. Kaede is still seething over that, over what Tsumugi did.

"She'll have to move eventually," Rantaro reassures her. "I don't think she's going to trap us forever, she can't. Give her a few days and she'll either end up burning herself out, although hopefully it won't come to that."

"I just...I don't know who *or* what is going to convince her to come out. I mean, literally everyone has spoken to her by now I think," Kaede says. "I know Kaito has and Himiko has told me she's tried a couple of times. It's like nothing is going through to her."

"Hey, try not to stress yourself out, okay? Yeah, it sucks that she's being so stubborn but at least nothing too bad is happening right now. If dealing with Angie is as bad as things are gonna get then I think we'll be fine."

"...and *after* Angie eventually moves?" Kaede asks. "Saihara will go back to negotiating and...I just don't think he's getting anywhere. He's convinced himself that he will but let's face the facts, if there was any chance of Team Danganronpa striking a deal with us then we'd all be long gone out of the simulation *and* office by now."

"Ah..." Rantaro looks a little lost as he runs a hand through his hair slowly. "That's...yeah, that's a problem we're going to have to deal with eventually."

“He’s just going to end up continuously torturing himself if he keeps going back to them,” Kaede continues. “Not only is he going to hurt himself but everyone else too. Staying here long term isn’t a viable plan and I have the feeling the longer he drags everything out, the worse everything is going to get. He’s dealing with people who put *actual* people through hell for fun, for goodness sake. Has it not clicked with him that they’re messing with him just as much as he’s messing with them?”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s making their negotiations go around in circles but I doubt they’re that stupid to let him keep on doing that. Either they’re aware of what he’s doing or they’re waiting for...I don’t know, something or someone who can get us all out the office by force,” Kaede says before swallowing. She wrings her hands shakily in her lap “And I know he’s trying to protect our memories. It...it just really scares me that it’s becoming more and more likely that he's not going to win.”

“Kaede...”

She chews her lip, her hair curtaining her face as her shoulders slump. “Everything just really sucks at the moment. A part of me just wishes we’re in some sort of surprise second simulation and actually get to wake up somewhere else completely, in a world that doesn’t love Danganronpa.”

Rantaro smiles tightly. “Now that certainly would be a plot twist.”

“I know, it’s just wishful thinking,” Kaede sighs softly. “I don’t think my heart can actually take any more big surprises like that.”

Rantaro makes a quiet noise of agreement as he finishes tucking in his duvet properly. He sits himself down on the edge of his bed, facing Kaede with a purposefully calm expression. For some reason, she finds his face rather reassuring. Whilst she’s gotten used to their new appearances outside of the simulation, having her typical features back is a welcome change and seeing everyone in their talent related outfits feels normal.

She slowly counts all the pieces of metal on Rantaro’s ear as she speaks. “Do you ever think about what’ll happen if we do manage to get out of the office? Sometimes, it kind of feels like an impossible goal but on the off chance everything miraculously works out, what then?”

“Sounds like something we’ll have to figure out on the go,” Rantaro admits. “But I think if you end up worrying about things that haven’t even happened, you’ll just end up making yourself ill. You’ve been through a lot, Kaede. I think we should try to take advantage of the fact everything is surprisingly *fine* at the moment and just take a step back from overthinking.”

“I’ve not been the only one who's been through a lot,” Kaede murmurs. “Everyone else has as well.”

“And whilst that is true, I’m not talking to everyone else, am I? I’m talking to *you*,” Rantaro says with a kind smile. “I understand what you’re saying and I’m not trying to invalidate your worries. I mean I get it, I worry a lot too. However, for some reason we’ve been given an opportunity to rewind and catch our breaths before the next inevitable bad thing happens. Shouldn’t we be doing that instead?”

“We...we should,” Kaede says before a sheepish look twitches on her face. “But it’s kind of hard to do that when a lot of the group are struggling. I don’t know, I just, ah, kind of feel like I need to look after everyone. It’s like this...instinct.”

Rantaro chuckles. "You wanting to take charge doesn't really surprise me if I'm being honest. You were like this last time we were here, always making sure the group was okay. Even in the office you were always fretting over Yumeno."

Kaede throws her hands helplessly in the air. "It's just...who I am! I mean, I suppose if there's one positive I can take away from being a character, at least I'm a *nice* one"

"Hmm, I can't imagine you any other way really," Rantaro says. He taps his chin. "You definitely don't give off delinquent vibes. Man, it's even hard trying to picture you bullying someone for fun. I've seen you angry before but, I mean, it was at *Shirogane*, which is valid. My impulse reaction when I even think about her is to cringe."

Kaede snorts. "I can't believe I actually punched her. I don't think I've ever been so angry in my entire life."

"I mean...she was being pretty shitty at that point in time."

"I don't think I was even in control of myself when I did it!" Kaede adds. "It just happened."

The only thing Kaede had ever hit before Tsumugi was random pieces of furniture around the academy for coins. Oh...and Angie. She tries to force herself to think about something else, wincing as she hears the phantom sound of her slapping Angie ring in her ears.

"But yeah, I'm glad that you're you," Rantaro says. "Character or not, you're pretty amazing."

"Ah, thank you!" Kaede feels a bashful smile tug on the corner of her lips. "You're pretty cool too!"

It amazes her how Rantaro is able to create a light and airy mood even in a frustrating situation. She can't tell if he's pretending that everything is going to be okay to reassure her or actually believes it. She knows he can get doubtful and can get nervous. She heard him toss and turn sporadically during the night. Maybe he just wants to encase them both in a beautiful lie for a short while until they're ready to face everything again.

She's kind of glad that he balances her out. She knows how impulsive she is. She's more likely to do something, hmm, not entirely *stupid* but also *not* thought out first and deal with the consequences later. He's very much the opposite, glossing painstakingly over every detail of a plan before going ahead with it. The only time he's ever surprised her was when he used the ticket without consulting her during their game. Apart from that, yeah, he's much more restrained. If she's a ship sailing a stormy ocean then he's the anchor that keeps her from crashing off course.

He's adventurous but at least he's careful enough that he makes sure everyone is safe before diving into a new venture headfirst. She's a well meaning bull in a china shop.

Speaking of good intentions, she can't help but wonder if she's doing the right thing by keeping quiet about the flashback light machine. She knows everyone is *aware* of it. A lot of people just don't know that there's a flashlight that can restore memories though.

It's a bitterly cruel discovery. She has even wished a couple of times she never found it so she doesn't have to think about it. Kaede knows that so many people here would do anything to get their friends back. She's kind of proud of herself for her newfound self control. She knows if she found the memory restoring flashlight a while back then she probably would've used it.

Remembering absolutely *everything* is just *too* much of a price. If the machine allowed for individual memories to be restored then she'd be more open about it. The fact that someone would

have to remember *dying* in order to remember everything else, it just doesn't seem like a very fair payoff. Deep down she knows everyone deserves to have the freedom to pick whether or not they'd ever want to use one but for now, she just wants to protect everyone.

Her stomach squeezes uncomfortably as she remembers how willing Rantaro was about offering to use on himself. Yes, he's the most *logical* person to test one out on but that doesn't mean it's right or fair to do so.

Sometimes she thinks about sneaking out and trying one but fear always holds her back. It's always on her mind though. It's not like she has much to remember either. However, every time she entertains the idea, her throat feels tight and she ends up feeling breathless. It's like her entire body is warning her that trying one out is a horrible idea and for once, Kaede thinks she'll listen.

She knows how self sacrificing some of the group are. Once everyone gets word about the flashlight, someone will eventually offer themselves up. It's inevitable. Someone's curiosity or desperation will get the better of them and they'll flick the light on with no hesitation.

She trusts that Himiko won't say anything for now. She seemed as equally as nervous about the lights too so that should be a big enough sign that she'll stay away from them. Miu? Kaede can imagine Miu making one so she can try and alter it. However, it's not like any of them know much about how the flashback lights work.

Well, Tsumugi probably knows but Kaede knows she won't trust a single word she says.

"You're zoning out again," Rantaro says gently. He leans forward. "Hey, maybe we should go and get some breakfast? Even if you're not hungry, it'll be a good distraction."

"Ah, yeah, you're right." Kaede stands up and grasps the straps of her backpack. He's right, she probably should find a way to distract herself so she stops losing herself in her thoughts. With how her mind is right now, she doesn't think she should be letting it wander too much. "Shall we get going?"

Rantaro looks at her with barely concealed worry in his eyes before standing up. "Sure."

"Hey, you don't need to look so worried." Kaede hovers by the door as he approaches. "I'm fine, okay? It's just gonna take me a while to relax. You understand, right?"

"Of course I do," he says before opening the door for her. "Just...remember that you can talk to me if you ever end up feeling too overwhelmed, got it?"

"The same applies to you too!"

Kaede heads to the dining room with a smile on her face and a friend by her side.

—

So it turns out finding a suitable location for a party is harder than expected.

Kaito groans as Kirumi shakes her head once more. She gives his lab a disapproving look. "Momota, it's far too cramped here and the staircase leading up is highly impractical. There's also the issue of me carrying food up here. Whilst I don't mind doing so, there isn't really anywhere to put it."

He barely manages to hold back a pathetic whine. Instead, he juts his bottom lip out and pretends he isn't sulking. Okay, yeah, *sure*. Kirumi said from the beginning that the labs weren't an ideal

place to set up a party but Kaito had hoped his *might've* been an exception. It's the first time he's been in it and it's awesome as fuck. Straight away he knew his room would be the perfect place for a party. He can imagine how stunning his room would look with the lights dimmed and stars projected onto the wall.

But no, Kirumi says the lab is too small and isn't suitable.

Yes, Kaito had valiantly tried to change her mind.

He did not succeed.

"Don't worry, Momota. Plenty of other places for us to check out," Gonta reassures him as they all leave Kaito's godly lab.

Kaito groans, throwing his head back as he stomps down the stairs. "We've already pretty much checked everywhere! Either wherever we like is too small or isn't good enough."

"If you want to throw the best party in the world then you're going to have to raise your standards," Kirumi says with a sniff. "You requested that I help throw an amazing party and I can't help with that if you pick an unsuitable venue."

"My lab is perfect though!" Kaito insists fervently. Like yeah, it's a *little* small but who cares about details like that? "Tell her, Kiibo!"

"It's...interesting," Kiibo says. "But us four barely managed to fit inside comfortably. You do have to admit it isn't practical at all, Momota."

"Then how about we all take turns being inside-"

"Momota, we're not using your lab," Kirumi says firmly. "Nor are we using Hoshi's tennis court, Gokuhara's lab or any of the other rooms in this school for that matter."

Gonta clenches his fist. "Gonta just had good feeling about this lab, thought it was perfect place to throw party! That way bugs can join in too!"

"Um, I don't think bugs are supposed to go to parties," Kiibo says.

"Eh?!" Gonta's eyes go wide. "But how are bugs supposed to enjoy themselves if-"

"Unfortunately because of our strict time limit, it will be impossible for us to be able to host a party that will accommodate thousands of bugs," Kirumi tells him sympathetically, although Kaito *swears* there's also a hint of relief in her voice. "My apologies but I think we'll have to exclude them from the guest list for now."

Gonta looks upset before shaking his head with an understanding smile. "Gonta gets it. Oh! Maybe Gonta can take notes at this party so he knows how to host one! Then Gonta can throw one for his bugs later on!"

"That sounds like a wonderful idea," Kirumi tells him as they all reach the bottom of the staircase. She pulls out her tablet and scans the map thoroughly, her eyes narrowed. "Like I thought, there's nowhere suitable in the school aside from the gym that'll be a good place for us to use."

"Aw man, not the *gym*," Kaito grumbles. "I mean, no offence but it's kind of lame in there. Totally gives me children's party vibes, you get me? I was thinking of having a party somewhere much more spectacular!"

“There is always the casino,” Kiibo points out, tapping the map carefully to point out where it is. “I’ve not been inside but casinos usually give off glamorous vibes, right? Perhaps we should’ve checked it out from the start.”

“The casino...” Kirumi ponders over the idea before nodding curtly. “Yes, that sounds like an excellent place to investigate. You are right, Kiibo. It would’ve been wise of us to check it out from the start.”

The casino, huh? Yeah, that sounds like an ideal venue. Whilst no one has the right attire to wear for such a luxurious venue, well, Kaito doubts anyone really cares about that anyway. There should already be some form of entertainment available there too. He hopes everyone likes gambling.

Kirumi walks them all to the casino, opening the large wooden door that leads towards two extremely tall and gaudy looking buildings. They’re both rather distinct. One is obviously the casino and the other building is a love hotel of all things. Kaito frowns as he checks out the prices.

“These prices are absolutely bullshit,” Kaito grumbles.

“Why are you checking the prices anyway?” Kiibo asks accusingly.

“Well a man is always curious about these sorts of things!” Kaito retorts quickly, crossing his arms. He notices his flushed cheeks in the reflection of the water nearby and slaps his face. “And don’t ask questions like that, man! I bet you were a little curious too!”

“I have no need to ever go to a love hotel so I wasn’t actually,” Kiibo responds.

Gonta tilts his head to the side. “Um, what is a love hotel exactly?”

“How about we look around the casino?” Kirumi suggests, ushering everyone away from the building and towards the other. “Even from outside I can tell that the hotel won’t be big enough for us all anyway.”

Gonta pauses. “But building look like same size as casino-”

Kirumi all but throws everyone inside the casino. Kaito lets out a low whistle as he looks around, eyes roaming everywhere. He thinks if he moves a couple of stools around then plenty of fold up tables will fit for food. He takes a step forward and his foot sinks ever so slightly into the plush carpet.

“This is much more extravagant than I thought it was going to be,” Kiibo murmurs as he looks around in awe. “My professor has never taken me into a casino before. Do all of them usually look like this?”

“Yes they do,” Kirumi answers. “I wouldn’t say this is anything extraordinarily different from a typical casino but it does fit a lot of criteria. It’s spacious and has plenty of seating. As well as that, I think I see that there are some games to play downstairs too.”

The top floor is bathed in a golden light, giving off a high end and luxurious feeling that makes Kaito feel like royalty. He almost has the urge to find a crown and put it on his head. He’s starting to feel extremely underdressed.

He eyes the prize counter lazily as he passes it, noticing an abundance of prizes hidden behind glass. He spots Gonta admiring a ladybug brooch as Kiibo examines what seems to be a robotic looking moustache. Since there’s so much to look at, Kaito decides he’ll take a better look once he’s checked out downstairs since he’s itching to check out what games are available.

Kirumi waits for him patiently at the top of the staircase. As he approaches, she smiles knowingly. “Shall we take a look?”

The staircase leading down has a golden railing attached to it, continuing the rich aesthetic downstairs too. Whilst the upstairs shimmers like gold, the downstairs is cast in a galaxy blue. There are countless slot machines lined up together on one side of the room, all of them blinking obnoxiously. There are stools paired with each machine, which is probably a tactic to get people to stay longer since they’ll have somewhere to sit.

On the other side of the room are more unique games. Kaito sees a driving simulator tucked in the corner, what looks to be a mining game and a fishing game too. Each game seems to have bear mascots as the main characters and he swears that he spots the Monokubs a couple times.

All in all, it looks like there’s plenty of entertainment, which ticks another box. The casino isn’t too far away from the kitchen either, so it’s not like Kirumi will have to do too much running back and forth with food. If she assembles a good team of helpers then Kaito is sure that making and transporting food and drinks won’t be no issue at all.

He puts his hands on his hips as he looks around quietly, a small smile on his face. Yes! This the absolute *perfect* place for a hero like him to host the best party in the universe! Whilst the blue lighting isn’t the exact shade, it somewhat resembles the lighting in his lab, which he takes as a fair compromise. Hosting the party over two floors also means there will be plenty of space for everyone. For all the antisocial people, there’s also a healthy amount of games for them to distract themselves with.

Judging by the approving look in Kirumi’s eyes, Kaito can tell that she likes this place too. “Well, Momota? What do you think?”

“I think this place will definitely work,” Kaito responds with a satisfied nod of his head. He can picture it now, colourful banners lining the walls and endless balloons to make the room pop. There’s already music playing which fits the vibes he’s going for.

“If you’re completely certain that you want the casino to be your venue then I’ll start with preparations right away,” Kirumi says. “The most important things we need to sort out now are decorations and a menu. I’m presuming you want me to handle the food, correct?”

There’s an eager look in her eyes, like she’s daring him to say no. “Well if that’s what you want!”

Kirumi nods. “I must admit I’ve already been planning what to make whilst looking around. I was thinking of different bite sized foods that’ll be easy to carry around. Whilst there is room for tables to put food on, I don’t think there’s enough space for an additional dining table.”

Man, she really thinks about the *super* small details. “What do you want me to do?”

“Find some decorations and bring them here,” Kirumi says. “It’s up to you if you want to put them up or not. Either way, I’ll come by later and help sort them out.”

“Wow, are you sure? I mean, I don’t want you overworking yourself.”

“Organising parties like these aren’t too big of a task for me, Momota,” Kirumi responds. “Whilst I appreciate your concern, I don’t plan to overwork myself either. Preparing food and decorations in a day won’t take too long, especially since I’m presuming Kiibo and Gonta will probably want to help me.”

“Yeah, they probably will. They’re good guys,” Kaito says, glancing at the two of them. They’re

both still upstairs, admiring the prizes.

“Momota,” Kirumi suddenly says. “Can I ask...what’s the *real* reason why you wanted to throw a party out of the blue? As I said earlier, I understand that you want to improve the group’s morale but I can’t help but think that’s not the only reason why.”

“Huh? What do you mean?” Kaito peers at her curiously. “I mean yeah, my top priority is raising morale so-”

“It just seems a little random,” Kirumi continues. “I’m not saying throwing one is a bad thing, I’m happy that you care so much about everyone. I’m just rather worried about...you.”

Kaito starts to splutter. “What? *Me*? Listen, sidekick. I’m completely fine so there’s absolutely nothing for you to worry about-”

“I understand if you’re using the party as a distraction,” Kirumi says. “What we’re dealing with is overwhelming, of course it’s only natural to seek distractions to keep yourself-”

“I’m just trying to unite the group, you know?” Kaito clenches his hand into a fist against his hip. “I mean right now, we’re pretty scattered. Angie’s blocking the exit, Shuichi is trying to leave all the time, a lot of people are still in their bedrooms. Hell, even Ouma still hasn’t come back yet. We’re not going to get through this if we can’t lean on each other. If we’re going to navigate through this mess, we need to be a team. It’s like going to space, an astronaut can’t get there alone. He needs his team to support him.”

“Do you really think this is going to be successful though?” Kirumi asks carefully. “You won’t be disappointed if people don’t turn up, will you? Whilst I do think a couple of people will come, I don’t think *everyone* will be here tomorrow.”

“I’m...” Kaito thinks about saying he’ll just drag everyone here himself but that isn’t fair. He knows he can’t force everyone to grin and bear the next couple of days, hell maybe even *weeks*. He knows things are tense, that some people are still practically strangers to each other. He decides that his party can act like some sort of unofficial meet and greet too.

He just really wants to build some trust between everyone, create a team so unstoppable that they can get through absolutely everything. He wants to be the glue that holds the group together, someone who the group can turn to no matter the situation.

Who fucking cares that he was written to be this way? He’s glad that he’s Kaito Momota, Luminary of the Stars. He’s glad that Team Danganronpa shot themselves in the foot when coming up with him. They’re the ones who made him into an unmovable force of nature. It feels like an appropriate sort of *fuck you* to lead the group through everything using his shiny personality.

“I’m sure everyone will come,” Kaito reassures her before she can say anything else. If he believes everyone will come then that means he’ll have a casino full of people tomorrow. He’s confident he will. Hell, he’s even sure unlikely guests like Angie and Kokichi will show their faces too. *That’s* how certain he is.

He’s confident, not desperate. He knows there’s a fine line between the two, he just chooses to be ignorant of it.

Kirumi unfortunately seems to have some sort of sixth sense when it comes to him telling white lies. She doesn’t call him out but her eyes do stay on him for a moment too long before she turns away. “I see. In that case, I’ll have to make enough food that’ll feed a large group of people.”

Hmm, it almost sounds like she was planning to make *smaller* portions on the off chance people don't show.

He knows deep down that she's only worried about him but he doesn't want people worrying about him, damn it. Worrying about him is just a waste of time, especially since there are plenty more pressing issues to think about.

If people ever have to start worrying about a hero then that means things truly are bad.

Kaito takes one last glance around the room before making a loud noise of approval, making it obviously clear that not only is their conversation done but he's also ready to leave. "So this place is definitely going to be our venue-"

"Momota, I still want to talk to you-"

"The sooner you start preparing, the better, yeah?" Kaito looks at her expectantly. "C'mon, sidekick! You've promised that you're gonna help me throw the most kickass party ever, right? We're not gonna get far if we just stand around!"

He heads back upstairs quickly, purposefully blanking Kirumi so he misses whatever she says as he rushes past her. Gonta blinks as Kaito suddenly appears next to him. The gentle giant is still looking at the ladybug brooch.

"Gonta check prize counter and found out that it's not locked," Gonta says before sliding one of the glass windows open. "But it doesn't feel right just taking things, kind of feels like stealing."

"On one hand, whilst it does feel morally wrong to take something from the prize counter, I think everything inside is for us in the first place," Kiibo responds. "Although I'd rather have some coins to exchange before taking anything. Momota, are there any games downstairs where you can win coins?"

Kaito nods eagerly. "Yep! Plenty of them!"

Kiibo's eyes shine with an innocent sparkle. "If that's the case then I think I'll wait until tomorrow to win some and exchange them for a prize."

Kirumi joins the trio, a slightly disgruntled look on her face. She looks at Kaito with a disapproving gaze before turning to Gonta and Kiibo. "Would the two of you like to help me prepare a menu for tomorrow? Whilst I won't start cooking until tomorrow so the food is fresh, I would still like some additional assistance with transporting the food from the kitchen to here."

Like Kaito predicted, both of them are more than happy to help. "Of course Gonta want to help!"

Kiibo nods with a pleased smile. "Yes, I think I would very much like that. Although I can't eat, I've always had an interest in food. Hopefully one day I'll be given the function to eat without it ruining my body."

"Maybe Iruma might be able to help you with that?" Kaito suggests. "Since she's an inventor and all."

Kiibo hums. "That is true..."

"Doubt that she'll be able to do anything for tomorrow but you can always just ask anyway," Kaito continues. He remembers how close Miu stood next to Kiibo in the gym the other day when Shuichi and Kaede told everyone about the truth regarding the outside world. He has a feeling Miu

had a pretty good relationship with Kiiibo once upon a time.

Gonta looks like he has something else to say but before he can, the casino doors open and Kaito spots Kaede and Rantaro peer inside. Kaede's eyes light up as Rantaro offers the group a lazy wave.

"My map said there were a bunch of people here so I thought I'd see what was going on," Kaede says as she approaches, putting her tablet into her backpack. She looks around the room in awe. "Wow, I don't think I've been somewhere so fancy before!"

"Kaede, Amami! Great! You're just in time!" Kaito throws out his arms wide as he gestures around the room with a smile of a seasoned showman.

"Just in time for what?" Rantaro asks curiously.

"For me to invite you both to my party tomorrow!" Kaito answers excitedly. "It's gonna be fucking awesome! It's gonna start around six in the evening so make sure you're both here for then, got it? You both definitely look like people who know how to have fun!"

Kaede looks rather amused by his choice of words. "Oh really?"

"Huh, a party actually sounds like the perfect idea," Rantaro murmurs, loud enough so everyone can hear his thoughts. He looks at Kaede. "What do you say? It's something to look forward to, at least."

"Yeah, of course we'll come!" Kaede agrees.

Kaito pumps a fist. "Hell yeah! You guys are *not* gonna regret it! I, Kaito Momota, am going to throw the best fucking party in the entire *galaxy*! Everyone will have no choice but to have fun when they realise how epic it's gonna be!"

"Do you need any help with setting anything up?" Rantaro asks. "If you're going to have it tomorrow then I'm going to presume you have a lot to prepare?"

"That's where I come in," Kirumi says. "Please don't worry, I already have everything under control. I appreciate your offer though. It was very kind of you."

"Yeah, everyone else's job is to relax and have fun," Kaito adds. "I know things are pretty fucking shitty right now and since it's my job to look after you guys, I'm gonna make sure everyone has the best night ever!"

"Since a lot of work needs to be done, I should start preparing the menu sooner rather than later," Kirumi says. "Gokuhara, Kiiibo? Would you both please accompany me to the kitchen? We'll see what ingredients are available before creating our menu."

"Okay!" Gonta waves cheerfully. "Gonta will see everyone later!"

"Momota," Kirumi says before she leaves. "Please remember to find some decorations at your earliest convenience. The best place for you to look is in the warehouse. If you can't find anything appropriate then alert me as soon as you can so I can prepare some decorations myself."

She nods her head at Kaede and Rantaro before leaving without a word. Oh. Kaito didn't realise he annoyed her *that* much.

"Is Tojo okay?" Kaede asks, a slight crease growing between her brows. "She looked a little

irritated about something.”

“I’m sure she’s fine,” Kaito reassures her. “We just had a little disagreement over something but I’m sure it’s nothing!”

Both Kaede and Rantaro share an uncertain look but thankfully don’t press the issue any further. Instead, Rantaro starts to fidget with one of his rings as he looks at Kaito with a curious expression. “So, you decided to throw a party?”

Kaito nods boisterously. “Yeah, the idea came to me last night! I mean *yeah*, I know it’s a *little* weird to throw one at a time like this but I need *some* way to get everyone out of their rooms! I get it, the whole truth about the outside world is pretty fucking grim but it’s not like we can do anything about it. Either we all wallow around in self pity or we keep our heads up high and I think I prefer the second choice!”

Kaede laughs, although judging by the warm look in her eyes, not at him. “I’ve missed your relentless optimism, you know? Even back when we were in a killing game, you always made sure everyone was okay. It’s...” Her eyes suddenly look suspiciously damp. “It’s really nice to have you around again.”

“Hey, you good?” Kaito asks cautiously. When Kaede tilts her head, he gestures at her face. “You kinda look like you’re about to burst into tears.”

“Ah!” Kaede quickly wipes her eyes with her sleeves. “Sorry, I’m...just *really* glad that you’re here. I didn’t realise how much I, ah, missed you until now.”

It feels like something is squeezing his lungs. Seeing Kaede hold back tears makes his throat feel tight. Even the smile on Rantaro’s face looks a little sad. “Oh, I, uh, I really appreciate it, sidekick.” Despite the fact he can’t remember ever being around these two, he’s suddenly hit with a wave of grief. “I’m sorry for, you know, not remembering either of you.”

I’m sorry that I left you alone, sidekick.

“It’s fine,” Rantaro reassures him.

“You...saved us both, you know?” Kaede suddenly tells him. “I, um, don’t know if you want me to say what happened during my, uh, our,” she says, pointing to Rantaro, “game but...”

“I saved you both?” Kaito blinks. His curiosity gets the better of him. “What happened?”

“We...” Rantaro twists his rings around his fingers a little more quickly. “Didn’t know the wall was an exit so we had to end our game the traditional way of having only two people survive. There was Kaede, me, you and...Shirogane. We had a class trial and found out she killed Ouma and got away with it. She was always supposed to be punished but in order for two people to leave the game, someone else had to be punished with her.”

“And before either of us could stop you, you offered yourself up,” Kaede says with a frustrated smile. “I was too sick to even stop you and you wouldn’t even let Rantaro offer himself.”

“You wanted me to look after Kaede,” Rantaro adds quietly.

Judging by how close Kaede and Rantaro are standing, their arms basically touching, Kaito can easily guess that Rantaro has been doing a good job.

There’s something...oddly familiar about what they’re saying. It’s like they’re describing a scene

out of a film he watched a long time ago that he can't entirely remember. Everything sounds *right* but he can't picture anything at all.

He feels another burst of grief before pushing it down. Whilst it would be nice to remember more about them both, he feels some sort of comfort seeing the two of them happy and safe together. He might've left them but at least he left them *together* and from his perspective, they both look okay.

"I tried my best to do what you asked," Rantaro says.

"He has," Kaede quickly says, linking her arm with Rantaro's. "We've *both* been looking after each other. I think if I didn't have him around when I was in the office then I don't know how I would've coped."

Kaito feels something akin to pride. "Well, if that's the case, why do you both look so sad? It sounds like the situation we were in wasn't ideal but I'm glad you both managed to get through it together."

"All thanks to you," Kaede says. "I don't think I'll ever be able to thank you enough, Kaito."

"You can thank me by making sure you show your faces at my party tomorrow," Kaito responds, hoping to steer the bittersweet atmosphere back to something more positive. "But in all seriousness, neither of you need to thank me, got it? I might not remember giving up my life for you both but I'm glad that I did."

"Just don't do it again," Kaede tells him. "I'm *serious*."

Kaito chuckles nervously at Kaede's stern face and quickly diverts his attention elsewhere. "H-Hey, have you both seen all the awesome prizes on offer?"

He can basically feel Kaede's fond eye roll as he turns around to point out all the different prizes. They've all been presented professionally so they look even more appealing. The golden lights cause anything shiny to sparkle and bathes everything else in a luxurious lighting. Since he never got a proper look at the prizes before, he decides to get a better look now before he leaves to find decorations. He doesn't want to put Kirumi in an even worse mood.

"There are some pretty cool things here," Rantaro says, thankfully playing along with Kaito's diversion. He rubs his chin. "Kind of expensive though. I don't think I have that many coins."

"All the coins I've found have been from bumping into furniture," Kaede admits as she pulls a couple from a hidden pocket. "They kind of just appear if you hit something hard enough."

"Oh! Is that how you find them?" Kaito asks. He was wondering how he was supposed to play games with no coins.

Kaede nods energetically before a playful grin grows on her lips. She lets out a shout before smacking a stool over, causing Kaito to yelp as he dodges it. The stool falls loudly onto the floor. A coin sits innocently where the stool once stood.

The pianist picks it up proudly. "See!"

"Ah, how interesting," Rantaro murmurs.

"G-Give a guy more warning next time," Kaito grumbles as he straightens himself back up, dusting off his jacket. "I thought you were aiming the stool at me!"

“Sorry!” Despite her apology, Kaede doesn’t look too apologetic.

Kaito pouts before quickly distracting himself by knocking over a different stool. The first one doesn’t reveal anything but the second one reveals not only one coin but two. He picks them up excitedly and sits them in the palm of his hand.

If he gathers enough coins then he’ll have enough to play plenty of games tomorrow. He starts to examine the prizes closely, narrowing his eyes as he searches through them.

“Whatcha looking for?” Kaede asks, following Kaito’s gaze.

“For the most expensive prize, of course!” Kaito answers. “It has to be the *best* one, right? Might as well go big or go home!”

Kaede snorts, shaking her head affectionately. “Whatever you say, Kaito.”

“Oh, I think this is it,” Rantaro suddenly says and points at something glistening on the top row. “Hmm, let’s see. Yeah, I think it is. Ten thousand coins for a single one. What’s it called...ah.”

“Let me see!” Kaito cranes his head up so he can see the prize. It’s a golden key adorned with a ruby red gem. “Eh? What sort of name is the Key of Love? Wait, hold on a second...” His eyes go wide. “Do these keys work in the hotel opposite us?”

“I...presume so,” Kaede says. She barely manages to suppress her laughter. “Are you *sure* this is what you want to win?”

“I mean, you don’t even have to win it. You could just take it now,” Rantaro points out.

Kaito shakes his head. “Nope, a real man wouldn’t just take it! If I want it then I gotta earn it! I mean, it’s a little weird but if it’s the most expensive prize then it’s my goal! I’m not leaving my party tomorrow without one of these bad boys!”

He stares at the key once more. Okay yeah, he’ll admit it. It’s a little *bizarre* for him to set the key as his goal but he’s not going to go back on his word now, damn it. He’s going to win a key and, well, he might as well use it another day, right? Only to explore the hotel though! He doesn’t have any other ulterior motives, thank you very much.

Upon closer inspection, he notices a small label attached to the key. Thankfully, the glass is clear enough for him to read what’s on it.

“The Key of Love gives the user an excellent chance to have their best sleep ever. The user will be able to have an experience of a lifetime with their ideal type of person for one night only. Warning, each key can only be used once so use it wisely,” Kaito murmurs as he reads the label out loud. “Huh...sounds kind of ominous.”

“What does it mean that you get to spend the night with your ideal type of person?” Rantaro wonders. “Almost sounds like someone will be waiting for you once you go inside the hotel.”

Kaede hums. “Sounds kind of mysterious.”

“How will the hotel even know who my ideal type of person is?” Kaito says. He rubs the tip of his nose as he pulls his gaze away from the golden key. “I mean, I’m not entirely sure what my type is in the first place.”

He misses how Kaede’s lips twitch into a mischievous grin. “Are you *sure* about that, Kaito?”

“Eh?”

“I could’ve sworn you mentioned something about...” She turns to Rantaro. “What was it that he said again? He likes people with purple eyes, right?”

“And someone who is a little smaller than him,” Rantaro adds airily.

Kaede nods, rubbing her chin in an overly theatrical way. “I could’ve *sworn* he mentioned he also likes people whose name starts with a K.”

Kaito narrows his eyes as he stares at them both suspiciously. “Why do I get the feeling you’re both teasing me?”

“Oh no, we’re *definitely* not,” Rantaro says, sounding frustratingly sincere. “Ah, Kaede! Don’t forget that they have one hell of an attitude and...” He does a satisfied nod as he finishes his list. “Oh yeah, white sleeves.”

“You guys sound way too specific to be teasing,” Kaito grumbles.

“*Andpurplehair*,” Kaede suddenly coughs into her hand before clearing her throat. “Whoops, sorry. There must’ve been something in my throat.”

Something tells Kaito she’s lying.

“What did you say?”

“Nothing! Absolutely nothing!” Kaede insists, grinning like a Cheshire cat. She bumps her elbow against Rantaro’s. “Isn’t that right?”

“Yep. Don’t worry about it.”

(Unbeknownst to Kaito, Kaede had told Rantaro about Kaito’s so called ‘*type*’ one night during their time in the office. Since it was a fond memory, Kaede was able to tell him about it with a happy smile.)

Despite feeling like he’s missing out on something, Kaito decides to ignore their teasing expressions and pulls himself away from the prize counter. He doesn’t sense any malicious intent coming from either of them so he figures that they must be joking around. Besides, they’re being rather *specific*. He’s not sure if he knows anyone with that list of features-

Actually wait, hold on a second.

Kaede fits the criteria perfectly. Huh. Sure, Kaede *is* pretty and yeah, Kaito likes her but...

...even thinking about her romantically would go against bro code. Kaede and Rantaro literally have their arms linked together and with how they look at each other, there’s definitely *something* going on between them, right? Kaito has absolutely no intention of messing up their relationship, whatever it may be.

Surely it’s just a coincidence that their theory of his ideal person is similar to Kaede. It has to be. He scratches his head. Are they referring to someone else here? Or did a past Kaito suddenly decide he had an extremely specific type for whatever reason?

He feels a headache start to brew.

“Aw, don’t worry. We were just teasing you,” Kaede tells him once she notices his slight frown.

She clasps his arm carefully. “So there’s no need to frown!”

Oh. Phew. “You really had me going there for a second, sidekick.”

“Yeah, well, there’s always a chance I’m wrong,” Kaede says. “A very...*small* chance but you know, still a chance regardless.”

“You’ll probably have a better chance finding out who your supposed type is by winning a key and using it,” Rantaro tells him. “Although good luck winning ten thousand coins. Let’s just hope the games aren’t rigged.”

“They better fucking not be,” Kaito huffs, clenching a fist.

“You could just hit furniture until you save up enough coins,” Kaede suggests with a thoughtful look on her face, looking like she’s actually contemplating doing that herself. She eyes one of the untouched stools with a hungry expression.

It’s an...*interesting* way of getting coins but Kaito doesn’t want people to get the wrong idea about him if he goes around launching pieces of furniture for coins. Yeah, he thinks he’ll stay away from that idea.

“Maybe you’re better off playing the games downstairs,” Rantaro quickly says, holding his hands up in mock defeat as Kaede pouts at him.

“That’s not as fun though,” Kaede mumbles under her breath.

“But it’ll be the most efficient way,” Kaito says. “Sorry, sidekick. Looks like you’ll be breaking furniture on your own.”

Kaede sighs, although she is unable to hide her amusement. “At least that means there’s more for me.”

It’s strange, they’re in a situation that would bring most people to their knees in despair yet here they are, joking around like nothing is wrong. It’s a nice feeling and Kaito feels warm, like he’s being hit by a ray of sun that’s managed to sneak its way through a slight crack of a closed curtain. He thinks what he’s feeling now is what he wants everyone else to feel tomorrow.

Content. Happy. Safe.

He may not know this group of people very well but there’s an incomprehensible desire for him to lead them through everything, to shield them from harm. Whilst he’s pretty sure he feels this way because that’s just how his character is, a more stubborn part of him swears his desire was born from his own free will. He wants these strangers to become his friends.

He wants to be friends with these strangers again.

Kaito doesn’t care how they all ended up in the simulation in the first place, none of that matters now. Sure, Angie blocking the exit has caused a slight problem reaching the end goal but he has a good feeling about her moving soon.

Once his party starts, everything will fall into place.

He’ll make sure of it.

I made a rather long post on my tumblr talking about writing and this fic in particular. Whilst not everything what I said is relevant for this fic, I'm just going to summarise anything I think is.

- This fic is going to 50 chapters long (depending on if I merge some chapters together or not, so either 50 in total or less)

-I've updated the tags to give readers a better warning of how dark this fic gets. I'll also make sure to leave more warnings in the top notes on any chapters I think need highlighting

I've basically solidified my ideas and plans for this story now, so updates should be a little quicker now that I'm much more confident how I want this fic to go and end! Thank you all for the patience and for dealing with me having my doubts haha, I've just dedicated so much time to this fic I just want to end it perfectly!

Oh yeah, I also wanted to say for anyone worried about the hints of Kaito using a hotel key, I don't plan to put any character in a situation where things get a little weird. I know the love hotel in the game had it's yuck moments and I promise I'm not going anywhere near any scenarios like that. If anything, what I have planned is more comedic and relationship building.

Sorry for the slight ramble! I'm just extremely pleased that I'm happy to work on this fic again!

Thank you all for reading!

Final Loop - Chapter 2 Part 4

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who left a comment and/or kudo on the last chapter!!! They really do mean a lot :)

Sorry if there are any mistakes!

I hope you all enjoy!!!

Kaito spends most of his free time preparing for his crazy awesome party.

He works alone mostly. Kirumi, Kiibo and Gonta work together in the kitchen whilst he whizzes between the academy and the casino, transporting boxes of decorations from one place to another. It's tiring work but he thinks that the end result will be worth it.

Throughout the day he makes sure to tell everyone about his plans. At first he considers making the party a surprise party but, well, he *actually* wants people to come. No one is going to go to a party they don't know about. He gets varying responses from everyone, a few enthusiastic whilst a couple lukewarm.

See, Kaito is *great* at observing people. Such as, when Tenko glances her eyes to the side when he tells her about his party, he knows she's on the fence about going. When Miu pumps her fist excitedly, he easily figures out that she's more than ready to let her hair down and do something other than waiting around.

His goal is to have *everyone* turn up. The more the merrier, right? He's received more positive responses than not so that's a good sign. He feels like he's doing something right and it fuels his motivation to push forward.

Keeping occupied has been extremely helpful. It has helped manage to reign in his wild thoughts and keep his worry subdued. Not that he's worried, of course. Well, okay, maybe he's *slightly* worried but that's only natural. It's not like he's an avid worrier, no, of course he isn't. His biggest concern is having a full house tonight. The fact that Angie still isn't budging and Kokichi hasn't shown his face is starting to concern him a little, especially since it's been well over a day since Kaito announced his plans to the night sky, hoping that Kokichi was listening from the office.

Maybe he didn't hear him? It's a valid thought but at the same time, Kaito knows how much he's rambled on about his party. Surely either Kiibo or Kokichi must know he has something planned by now, right? At this rate, Kaito thinks he's going to have to find a way to move either Angie or the Exisal she's in and grab Kokichi himself.

He's not throwing a party for selfish reasons, fuck no. He's throwing a party for everyone as a way to look after them. He's *sick* of seeing everyone's gloomy faces. Even if it's just for one night, he wants to shield everyone from the harsh realities that are looming over them like a relentless thunder cloud. He doesn't care that he doesn't exactly know everyone here, he's going to change that. Besides, even though everyone is technically a stranger to him, there's always this dim recollection lingering in the back of his mind when he speaks to people. It feels wrong to label

everyone here as strangers. It's just a struggle to figure out what to call them instead.

Kaito takes a step back from some bunting he's just finished hanging and admires his work with a satisfied grin. He's spent the entire morning and early afternoon decorating the casino to perfection. Sure, the casino was appealing enough without him adding some extra details. However, his party won't be the best in the *galaxy* if he settles for mediocrity.

He's already set up some tables upstairs, covering them with some cool fabric he found in the warehouse last night. He's done everything he needs to do. His job now is to wait for the food to be done and then he can kick start the party of the century.

The food won't be ready for a couple hours though. Kirumi has been very particular about cooking food at set times so everything will be the right temperature. Whilst Kaito has been putting his all into making sure the party will be a success, Kirumi is in a different league when it comes to perfection. He won't admit this out loud but he can't compete with her when it comes to things like this. On one hand working with someone as professional as her brings out his competitive side. On the other hand, he's glad that he has someone like her on his team because her assistance all but guarantees a successful party.

Her expression always seems to cool whenever he checks in on her lately. Not in a nasty way, more so in a stubborn one. He'll hold his hands up, Kaito is well aware that they have different ideals and ways of thinking. She plans everything out and aims for perfection. He's more of an act now and worry about the consequences later sort of guy. Both personalities have their strengths and weaknesses, he knows and respects that.

His way of doing things is better though.

Like yeah, *sometimes* planning ahead is crucial to success but wasting time sweating about the smaller details is *exhausting*. Kaito likes to go with the flow. He likes to think that his fate is already written in the stars and that he's got the entire galaxy looking out for him. Okay *sure*, he knows life can be fickle and sometimes there's going to be crossroads for him to tackle but that's what makes life fun.

The only thing he needs to worry about is believing in himself and everyone around him. Because he knows that the universe has his back, his job is to keep his chin up and strive towards his goals.

So yeah, he knows that he and Kirumi have different mindsets. He just wishes she would loosen up a little. He's handling everything so that means she has nothing to worry about. Sometimes it just feels like she's actively going out of her way to find things to fret over, which kind of defeats the point of Kaito shouldering everyone's burdens.

He rolls his shoulders subconsciously as he feels a phantom weight press against him. He's not stupid, he knows that can't carry around everyone's worry like it's an actual object he can hold in his hands. Sometimes, very rarely though, his body feels heavy, like there's something invisible chaining him down. There are moments where it feels like there's lead in his lips, making it impossible to crack a smile. There are moments where it feels like his bones are boulders and even walking makes him feel like he's trudging up a slippery slope.

But those moments are rare. Next to *impossible*, in fact. Tiny little glitches that interrupt his flawless attitude.

Kaito finishes admiring his work and leaves the casino. It's exciting to think that the next time he'll be in here, it'll be to host his party so he can bring the group closer.

It's roughly late in the afternoon so there's not long until his party starts. However, he does have some free time to kill before then. He thinks about rallying everyone up just to make sure everyone attends. He steps past the wooden door that conceals the hotel and casino and instantly shades his eyes. It's so fucking *weird* how one part of the school is bathed in twilight and the other is lit up by the sun. He rapidly blinks as he gathers his bearings.

As he does so, he hears voices in the distance. He stumbles down the brick path away from the wooden door, his vision slowly returning to him. From what it sounds like, the voices are near the lower part of the courtyard. If he had to guess, he's going to presume that someone is trying to coax Angie away from the exit. *Again*. It's not unusual to see or hear people near the yellow Exisal Angie has taken over.

To his surprise, Shuichi isn't a part of the small group that is in front of the Exisal. The detective spends most of his time nowadays arguing with the artist, although lately it seems their arguments have been one sided. If Shuichi isn't arguing then he's in bed sleeping.

Standing nearby the Exisal are Himiko, Tenko and Ryoma, although from the looks of things, it seems Kaito has just missed their pleading. Himiko looks defeated whilst Tenko looks downright miserable. Only Ryoma seems to be wearing a more neutral expression, although there is a slight crease between his brows.

Kaito approaches the group with a carefree smile. After all, there's no point further fuelling everyone's misery with a frown. "Hey! You guys good?"

"Angie still won't move," Himiko mumbles dejectedly, a small pout on her face. Her hazel eyes glare halfheartedly at the floor. "Even though it's been days now. I know Angie can be stubborn but I didn't think..."

"She's barely even responding to anyone too," Ryoma adds gruffly. Whilst his face would suggest that he's unbothered, there's a concoction of worry and exhaustion in his eyes. "Starting to think that she's never going to move at this rate."

Kaito juts his bottom lip out for a brief second before shaking his head. "Nah, she'll move soon. As soon as my party starts, she'll have no other choice but to leave so she can come! I wouldn't worry about her too much."

"It's strange how quiet she's being though," Himiko responds. She sighs softly and starts to fiddle with her blazer sleeves as if by habit. "Angie usually always has something to say. When she actually says something though, she sounds really...*tired*. It just doesn't sound right at all."

"She's probably exhausted," Ryoma tells her reassuringly. He camouflages the worry in his eyes and shadows the concern in his voice, making himself sound more confident. Himiko must be easily fooled by the tennis player's cool response since she stops playing with her sleeves to look at him. "If you're blaming yourself for not being able to get her to leave then don't. Might not know Angie well but I get the feeling that she's the sort of person who is stubborn. I know you're worried about her but..."

He looks over at Kaito, as if silently asking him to step in. "Hoshi's right. There's no point blaming yourself for her stubbornness! Angie's the one who decided to block the exit, not you."

"I just..." Himiko chews on her lip as her eyes cloud over momentarily. "Kinda hoped she would at least listen to *me*. We were friends once. I *hate* that she can't remember us hanging out together. She's always been stubborn but at least back then she listened to me."

Tenko quietly plays with one of her curvy plaits, looking uncomfortable. It's a surprise to see her outside. After hearing the truth about the outside world, the aikido master must've decided that her bedroom would be her sanctuary. She scarcely leaves it. Kaito mostly only sees her on the off chance he's nearby when Kirumi is delivering her food.

He can't help but find it odd that Tenko looks so sombre. It's like all the bubbly energy she had when she first woke up here has been zapped from her. He's only interacted with her a handful of times but every conversation they've had, Tenko usually bounced around from emotion to emotion in a blink of an eye, happy one second and extremely mad the next. Now she looks lost.

She's standing rather close to Himiko, although Kaito has a feeling that it's *Himiko* who is purposefully standing so close to the aikido master. Whilst Tenko doesn't seem entirely present, Himiko definitely is. Maybe they were friends once?

"I suppose all we can do is keep trying," Ryoma tells the magician. He wrinkles his nose before letting out a weary exhale of breath. "I want to leave too, only so I can check in on Ouma."

Who *really* should've turned up by now. Kaito's concern about him starts to toe the line of becoming irritation. He hates that he has no idea what the other purple haired male is up to. He doesn't even know what sort of condition he's in. For all he knows, Kokichi could be too sick to even stand still. When they all left to go back in the simulation, Kokichi was sprawled out face first on the floor. Fuck, what if he still is?

However, as Kaito eyes the unmoving yellow Exisal, he gets this gut feeling that Angie isn't going to budge at this moment of time. It's frustrating but he thinks she might only move later on, hopefully when his party starts. If she isn't even listening to her past best friend then that just proves how hellbent she is about staying in the Exisal.

Even though he wants to see just what the fuck is going on with Kokichi, he needs to accept that he's going to need a lot of patience to wait for Angie to move. It's just a shame that patience has never really been one of his strong suits.

Kaito realises that he's allowed a grimace to grow on his face and he quickly shakes his head, blurring his expression as he morphs it back into a heroic grin. "You'll be able to see him soon, I promise! We just need to wait for Angie to get fed up, that's all! If she's barely responding to anyone now then that means her resolve must be wavering. She's gonna realise that she can't stay in the Exisal forever and when she does, she'll have no choice but to leave."

"Nyeh...I know that," Himiko mumbles. "But I don't want her to just...give up. That isn't something Angie would do. I just sort of wish that she'd leave the Exisal because she's figured out a different way to deal with the truth without causing problems for everyone else. I know that she isn't purposefully trying to be a nuisance. She really isn't. Angie just deals with stuff her own way."

There's a defensive edge to her voice, as if Himiko is daring for someone to tell her that Angie is being an *actual* threat to the group. Huh, Kaito isn't sure how close they were before but they must've had a solid friendship for Himiko to get this worked up.

Himiko's protective glare causes some of Kaito's annoyance over Angie to soften. At the end of the day, Angie is still a person with emotions. It's not every day a stranger comes along and dumps a mind boggling truth onto you, flipping your entire world upside down. In fact, Kaito supposes it's lucky that Angie has been the only person to act out in a disruptive way. Things could be worse right now, although they could be a hell of a lot better too.

It's easy to view Angie's actions as annoying, hell, Kaito himself is guilty of being irritated by her actions. It's only human that he's being so critical of her. It's also human of her to act out too. Whilst he's annoyed with her, he supposes there's something humane about her picking to block the exit. All she knows about the outside world is that it's a horrifyingly disgusting place filled with people so cruel that it almost feels like the real world is fictional instead of the world they're living in.

"You know, Angie is lucky to have a friend like you," Kaito suddenly says, causing Himiko to blink. "It takes a lot of guts to defend someone in her position."

"She's not a bad person," Himiko insists. "She just...does a lot of strange things to keep herself safe. And everyone else too. Angie can be selfish but deep down, I think she cares. She just expresses herself differently, that's all."

"Just kinda wish she'd taken a different approach," Kaito admits. "It wasn't fair of her to block the exit without saying something first. I get that she's scared but she could've just talked to one of us instead of doing something so extreme."

"People lash out when they've been pushed to their limit," Ryoma responds with a faraway look in his eyes. He talks as if he's recalling something rather than offering advice. "We should be grateful that she's only barricading us in."

Himiko kicks the floor lightly with the tip of her shoe. "We're lucky no one has fallen into despair. I know everyone is probably sick of that word but it's the only one that really works."

She's right, Kaito *is* sick of that word. He knows he hasn't had to deal with Tsumugi as much as some other people have but she's already ruined the word despair for him. It makes him want to punch a wall when he thinks about how much she glorifies suffering.

"Hah, well, of course no one is going to succumb!" Kaito laughs. "As far as I'm concerned, despair is fucking banished from this simulation from now on."

"I don't think that's how despair works," Ryoma sighs, shaking his head. "Don't think everyone has the same mental strength as you, Momota. Don't want to concern you but despair can creep in at any time and ruin even the most strong willed people you know. Considering our circumstances...well, it would be stupid to think these next couple days or even weeks are going to be easy."

Ryoma's stern voice causes Kaito to swallow nervously. "Yeah, well, that's where I come in--"

"Having one person handling too many burdens alone is a bad idea," Ryoma firmly says. "I believe in you Momota, I really do. However, you're not invincible. No one here is. It's just...the more you convince yourself that you're capable of fixing everything, the more it's going to hurt if things go south. I've already had to deal with one friend crumbling under a similar sort of pressure and I'm not letting something like that happen again."

There's something final about his words. Kaito opens his mouth to object but stops as he notices Ryoma's daring expression. Even Kaito knows when he's fighting a losing battle. That doesn't stop him from curling his hands into tight fists, as if trying to contain himself. He's not pissed off at Ryoma, if anything, he's *scared* by how accurate the tennis player is. He doesn't let his fear show though, a hero never lets anyone know that he's worried.

Himiko makes a sympathetic noise, like she knows what Ryoma is referring to. Tenko simply shrinks into herself even more, staring down at the floor with a helpless look in her eyes.

“Didn’t mean to upset anyone,” Ryoma murmurs. “Just saying what needs to be said. Besides, as your sidekick, Momota, it’s my responsibility to help you out. Just because I’m worried that things might get worse the longer we stay here, that doesn’t mean I don’t want to help when I can. Starting with making sure everyone goes to your party.”

The atmosphere suddenly shifts into something less tense and Kaito finally stops feeling like he’s teetering along a fraying tightrope.

He wants to correct Ryoma about his role as his sidekick. It’s Kaito’s job as a hero to make sure he has his sidekick’s backs, to absorb all their worries until they can make their own progress. His sidekicks should *never* have to worry about him or think that they have to aid him in any way.

It’s a little bothersome that both Kirumi and Ryoma seem to have different ideas over what a sidekick is. He supposes they’re taking the more traditional route. However, there’s a huge difference between being a *regular* sidekick and a sidekick belonging to the Luminary of the Stars.

“We’re coming,” Himiko says as she gestures at herself and Tenko.

Tenko looks a little uncertain. “But Tenko isn’t sure if she wants to go...”

“Even if you don’t want to go, you should still show your face for a little while,” Himiko insists. “And I really want you to come. It’s been ages since we’ve been able to hang out together and I...” She tugs on her hat as a flustered blush crawls up her neck. “I’ve missed being around you.”

“Oh.” Tenko starts to rub her forehead, as if she’s suddenly been plagued by a surprise headache. “Yumeno...” Tenko winces as she struggles to say her next words. “Were we...*friends* in a different game? Tenko is really sorry but she’s struggling to remember.”

Himiko sucks in a sharp breath and hides her face under her hat. She fails to hide how upset she sounds. “We...yeah, we sorta were. Y-You treat me like I was your precious friend. I...”

The magician sniffs and Tenko’s grimace turns into guilt. “Ah, Tenko didn’t mean to make you cry!”

“I-I’m not crying,” Himiko desperately insists, although she continues to shadow her face with her hat. “I just got something in my eye, I swear.”

Kaito senses guilt coming from both girls. He doesn’t entirely understand what’s going on but it seems both of them are upset with themselves for completely different reasons. Tenko is obviously upset that she forgot Himiko and caused the magician grief because she did. Himiko however... Kaito isn’t sure what’s bothering her. He has a feeling something must’ve happened between them both in a different loop.

Considering how upset Tenko was earlier, there’s no doubt that she probably feels even worse now.

“Going to Momota’s party will give you both a good opportunity to catch up,” Ryoma suddenly says. “But that’s only if you both want to go. I think it would be nice if everyone comes along but I’m not gonna force people to show up either. How about you both think about it, yeah?”

Tenko gnaws at her lip as she mulls over his words. “Um...Tenko would like it if she had the chance to think things over. She’s just...really struggling right now.”

“I didn’t mean to guilt you into coming,” Himiko tells her. “I, um...”

“Tenko promises she’ll think about it,” Tenko responds with a tiny smile. “But right now she’s... dealing with too many emotions at once. It’s like they’re all stuck together and Tenko can’t pick them apart. It’s...very exhausting to deal with.”

“If you want, I can walk you back to your room?” Himiko suggests.

Tenko pauses before nodding, accepting Himiko’s hand as the magician gently leads her to the dormitory.

“Hope she feels better soon,” Ryoma murmurs as he watches the two leave with his hands in his pockets. “Never seen Chabashira so down before. I suppose if she’s struggling to figure out how she feels then I can’t blame her for being so flat though.”

Something about seeing Tenko’s sad face makes Kaito feel more upset than anticipated. He puts a fisted hand against his hip and pulls a face. “She’s my sidekick, right? I’ll make sure she’s okay.”

“Give her some space for now,” Ryoma tells him. “I think Yumeno would appreciate some time alone with her too.”

“What do you think happened between them both?” Kaito asks.

Ryoma shrugs. “Something must’ve happened in the first game. Yumeno hasn’t really mentioned much about it though so I can’t say I know anything for certain.”

Watching Himiko and Tenko retreat towards the dormitory makes Kaito’s desire for his party to be a success grow stronger than ever.

—

After his encounter with Himiko, Tenko and Ryoma, Kaito decides to take a different approach when it comes to getting people to go to the casino. Whilst he’s adamant that he wants everyone there, he becomes a little more lax about pushing people to go. The only person he *actually* drags to the casino personally once it’s time for the party to start is Shuichi.

See, whilst heading to the casino, he sees Shuichi head in the opposite direction towards Angie. Kaito intercepts him by throwing an arm around the detective’s shoulder and firmly steers him in the direction of the casino.

“Shuichi, bro, my party is *this* way,” Kaito laughs, acting like Shuichi went the wrong way by accident.

Shuichi doesn’t try to escape but the desperation in his eyes is a big enough indicator that he never actually planned to go to the party. For some reason, the revelation stings.

“I, ah, know but-”

“C’mon, it’s literally time for it to start,” Kaito presses excitedly. He leads them both through the wooden door and into the casino, where Kirumi, Kiibo and Gonta are putting down the final plates of food.

Everything looks mouth-wateringly good. As soon as Kaito steps inside, he’s hit with several aromas of carefully made food at once. He sees different coloured plates of jelly glisten invitingly under the golden lights. There’s a mountain of pastries stacked on top of each other in a pyramid. He sees a variety of meats skewered onto tiny cocktail sticks. Everything looks so colourful and vibrant. Each table has a cloud of fine steam hovering enticingly over it, as if proudly showing off

the freshly made food.

It honestly looks like the trio, particularly Kirumi, have created a fine work of art instead of food for a party. Whilst Kirumi has a satisfied smile on her face as she examines her work, Gonta and Kiibo look extremely proud, like they've managed to accomplish something they thought wasn't possible.

"Momota, Saihara! Look at what we've made!" Gonta eagerly gestures his hands at the tables. "Gonta doesn't think he's ever made so much food before! He was worried that the food wasn't going to be ready in time but Tojo *really* good at figuring out when to start cooking and preparing things."

"It's important when creating menus for events like these to plan out how much time you need to prepare each dish," Kirumi says. She lets out a pleased hum as her eyes land on an impressively large cake. It's been dusted with a light layer of icing sugar. "I am more than satisfied with what we've accomplished. I must thank you both for your help."

"I must admit I helped because I wanted to watch how human food is prepared," Kiibo responds. There's a slight pout on his face. "It's times like this I wish my professor installed a function that allows me to eat without ruining my body. I don't think I've ever seen food as appetising as this before."

"Momota made it very clear he wants this party to be quote on quote, *the best in the galaxy*. His high standards meant I needed to plan a high quality menu," Kirumi tells him. She turns to Kaito and thankfully she doesn't annoy him anymore. "Everything is to your satisfaction, right?"

"Hell *yeah* it is, sidekick!" Kaito figures it's safe enough to let go of Shuichi's shoulder now that he's got him inside the casino. "Amazing job! I knew you wouldn't let me down!"

Kirumi seems almost amused with his response. "I also made sure that there's enough food for everyone here like you instructed."

He's not sure if she's making a slight dig at him, especially since it's technically past the starting time of the party and there's only five of them in the casino. He's not too worried though since it's not like the party has been raging on for hours. It literally just started a couple minutes ago.

Kaito is about to respond when the casino doors open and Maki steps inside. Since he's been so busy, Kaito hasn't been able to talk to her much recently. Honestly, it's a relief to see her here considering how upset she was the last time he saw her. For a second, her eyes go wide at the sight of all the food and decorations before she quickly schools her face back into its usual passive expression.

"Harukawa!" Kaito cheerfully greets her, placing a hand on her shoulder when she's in reaching distance. When she doesn't shrug him off, he figures she doesn't mind. "You made it!"

"Of course I did," Maki responds. "I figured if I didn't turn up myself then you probably would've ended up carrying me here yourself."

Kaito snorts. She's not *entirely* wrong. "But you're glad you're here, right?"

"...yeah." Maki glances around the room with a guarded expression, eyeing the balloons almost curiously. "Are there usually this many decorations at a party? It seems a little over the top to me."

"The more decorations, the better!" Kaito quickly tells her.

“Oh, has Harukawa not been to a party before?” Gonta asks with an understanding smile. He’s completely oblivious to how Maki freezes, although since Kaito has a hand on her shoulder, he feels how her shoulders tense up. “Don’t worry, Gonta hasn’t either! We can experience first party together!”

“I haven’t exactly been to a party either,” Kiibo adds. “Especially not one at a casino.”

Maki suddenly relaxes and Kaito wonders if she thought she was the only person who hadn’t been invited to a party before. He supposes since she’s been brought up as an assassin, of course she’s never had time to experience what a party is like. Lucky for her, her first party is being hosted by the Luminary of the Stars himself.

Huh, now that he thinks about it, how many people here haven’t had the chance to go to a party before? Since they’re all Ultimates, their childhoods were filled with honing their talents. Kaito wonders if this party might be the first one for a lot of people.

“Well I’ve already decided that this is going to be the best party ever!” Kaito enthusiastically declares. “Hey, Harukawa? Have you seen the food? It looks great, right?”

“It does,” Maki agrees. She looks at the food with a blank expression, as if she’s trying to figure out why Kaito thinks it looks so impressive. “I’ve never really had much of an opinion when it comes to food. As long as whatever I eat fills me up and gives me energy, I’ve never really cared about what my meal is.”

“Eh? Really?” Gonta looks surprised.

Kaito chuckles. “Well I bet *everything* that these three have made is going to blow your mind!”

The door opens again, revealing Kaede and Rantaro. They look a little sheepish, which is probably due to the fact that they’re late. Both of them let out appreciative noises as they spot the display of food.

“Oh *wow!*” Kaede instantly loses her sheepish expression as her eyes land on a bowl of jelly sweets. “I didn’t think everything was going to be this extravagant!”

“I suddenly feel like we’re all underdressed,” Rantaro admits as he looks down at his clothes and then at the casino.

Kaito makes a dismissive noise as he lazily waves a hand in the air. “*Psh*, who cares? It’s not like we’ve got much choice when it comes to what we can wear in the first place. I swear my wardrobe is full of the same outfit over and over again!”

“Same here,” Kaede says. She plucks the edge of her skirt with a warm smile. “Although I really do like my outfit, especially my skirt! I don’t think I’ve seen anything like it before.”

“Gonta likes his suit,” Gonta adds, proudly smoothing down his blazer lapels. Out of everyone here, he probably looks the most well dressed. Well, sort of. He’s still barefoot and his hair looks like it could use a hairbrush.

The door slams open again and Miu struts inside with a bottle of what is highly likely alcohol in one of her hands. Behind her is Ryoma, who offers Kaito a nod when their eyes meet.

Miu instantly eyes a large bowl of fruit punch and a mischievous grin grows on her face. “I know how I can make that punch ten times-”

“You are *not* adding alcohol to anything here,” Kirumi firmly says as she plucks the bottle from Miu’s hands before the inventor can stop her.

Miu blinks dumbly at her empty hands before huffing. “Tch. Killjoy.”

“I said she’d take it off you the moment she sees it,” Ryoma tells Miu as he passes her.

As Miu starts to grumble under her breath, Kirumi puts the bottle to one side with a sigh. “Alcohol isn’t necessary for a successful party. Additionally, I’d rather you *didn’t* infuse any of the food or beverages here with it, *especially* without telling anyone first.”

“It’s not like I was hiding it!” Miu points out. Well, she isn’t wrong.

Before an argument breaks out, Kaito quickly derails the conversation. “So, did any of you see anyone else outside?”

Kaede shakes her head. “Nope. I knew Hoshi and Iruma were a little behind us but I didn’t see anyone else.”

Oh.

“Everyone else could still be getting ready,” Rantaro points out. “It’s not uncommon for people to turn up late.”

“Has Amami been to a lot of parties before?” Gonta asks curiously.

Rantaro nods with a pleasant smile. “My family is the type to throw parties for the hell of it. Mostly it was so my dad could mingle with affluent people and expand his social network. I never really found any of them fun.”

“That’s because you’ve never been to a party thrown by *me*,” Kaito tells him. Whilst not everyone is here yet, it’s starting to become obvious that everyone is hovering around uncertainly upstairs since they’re not sure what to do. “I don’t know about you guys but I totally want to check out the games downstairs. I’m not ending this party until I save up enough coins to win a prize!”

Everyone looks over at the prize counter. Even though there’s no one maintaining the prizes, everything still looks as sparkly as ever. It is as if it’s impossible for anything on display to get dusty.

“You know you can just take what you want, right?” Maki points out. If something has caught her eye then she doesn’t make it obvious.

“Yeah but...that just doesn’t sit right with me,” Kaito responds as he heads towards the stairs. “It won’t be as satisfying if I just raid the prize counter! Besides, sometimes it’s more fun working towards your goal than reaching it.”

He watches as a couple of people spill out into the bottom floor of the casino. Gonta instantly takes an interest in the fishing game and Ryoma joins him, watching the mechanical fish swim past like he’s a cat in an aquarium. Kaede and Rantaro head for the slot machines. It’s fairly obvious to spot where they are since Kaede smacks every stool she passes and picks up a hefty amount of coins for her effort, leaving a trail of destruction in her wake.

Kaito can make out Shuichi’s shoes upstairs. Whilst he hasn’t come down, it looks like he might be talking to Kirumi. Well, as long as he doesn’t leave right away then Kaito doesn’t mind what he does.

He spots a two player driving game and quickly tugs Maki towards it, missing the flash of surprise on her face caused by his sudden pull. “Hey, let’s play this since we can both play it together!”

Kaito sits down and adjusts his seat whilst Maki wavers next to hers. “I don’t know how this works.”

“Oh, it’s easy,” Kaito reassures her, placing both of his hands on the plastic steering wheel in front of him. “You know how driving works, right?”

“Barely,” Maki admits. She sits down uneasily. Her seat is too far back for her to reach anything comfortably so Kaito leans over and pulls on the lever by her side, pushing it forward for her. She blinks as she’s suddenly sprung forward.

“There, now you can actually reach everything properly,” Kaito says. He watches as Maki copies him, putting her hands on her own steering wheel. “Right, so of course this is a game so it’s nothing like driving in real life but you still got a wheel to turn and pedals to push. The right pedal is the accelerator and the left is the brake. The more you push down on them, the more power you put in them. Slamming down on the accelerator will make you go faster whilst doing that on the brake will make you stop more abruptly.”

“Oh, I guess that makes sense,” Maki says as she gives the accelerator an experimental press. “And what’s the goal?”

“To do three laps the quickest,” Kaito tells her. “We’ll be playing against each other so there will only be us on the road, well, unless there are any other obstacles. Which there *probably* will be.”

Maki nods as she positions herself carefully. Kaito takes control over setting up the game, using his steering wheel to set up everything. He even inserts his own coins into the machine for the two of them. He reads through what the prizes are for this game and is satisfied with what’s on offer. It’s basically impossible to lose money playing this game, unless he somehow manages to mess up *spectacularly*.

They both pick what car they want to drive and the game loads up. Kaito senses that he might get an easy win out of this and relaxes, holding his steering wheel loosely. He notices Maki tighten her grip on hers and flex one of her legs as the countdown begins. He doesn’t think anything of her position, chalking up her serious expression as her wanting to simply get through the game successfully at least once.

The countdown ends and Maki abruptly slams her foot down on the accelerator until it’s level with the floor and she speeds off instantly, causing Kaito to make a choked noise of disbelief. He watches as her car whizzes off ahead and instantly slams down on his own pedal, spinning his wheel tightly to dodge a tight turn.

Maki plays the game like it’s her mission is to win. He doesn’t think she considers the brakes an option and weaves in between each obstacle on the road instead of slowing down when she reaches them. When a Monokub pops up out of nowhere in the game, she runs it over without a second thought.

For someone who hasn’t played this game before, she’s frighteningly good at it. Maki spins her wheel coolly, turning a tight corner perfectly as Kaito drives directly into a wall. As his car spins out of control, Maki zooms over the finish line for the first time.

“I thought you never played this game before?!” Kaito cries as he gains control of his car.

“I haven’t,” Maki responds bluntly before driving over something that causes her car to gain even more speed.

Kaito ends up losing. Maki seems equally pleased as she is surprised as her screen announces she has won. A large amount of coins land on her lap from the machine whilst Kaito wins significantly less.

“Oh, I wasn’t expecting to win coins,” Maki says as she lifts one up with a bored expression.

“Are you *sure* you’ve never played before?” Kaito asks as he pockets his own. Whilst his instinct is to sulk because he lost, he holds back as he notices Maki’s innocent look of curiosity as the game displays her impressive score. “Hey, I think you actually created a new record!”

“I did?” The corners of Maki’s lips twitch up for a brief second. “I didn’t think the game was that hard.”

“Yeah, well, *most* people tend to use the brakes when playing,” Kaito says. “I don’t think you used them once.”

“Because I saw no need.” Maki blinks. “Was I supposed to?”

Kaito chuckles at her genuine surprise. “Nah, the aim of the game is to be the fastest, after all.”

He sits back and rolls his shoulders, which are starting to ache due to the hunched position he was in. “...do you want my coins? I don’t actually want anything here so...”

Whilst her offer is enticing, Kaito shakes his head. “You earned them so you gotta keep them! Surely there must be *something* that you want?”

“I...” Maki sighs as she slips her coins into a hidden pocket. “I guess I can have a look later.”

Kaito smiles and looks over his shoulder. Tenko and Himiko must’ve arrived whilst he was playing. He spots them both checking out a puzzle game nearby. He can’t help but smile. Whilst he’s still missing a few people, at least a large majority of the group is now here. His grin only grows as he suddenly hears Korekiyo talking to Kirumi upstairs.

Holy shit. Almost everyone is at his party.

“Momota?” Maki’s voice tethers him back to reality. He turns to face her. “...you haven’t been purposefully keeping yourself busy so you don’t have to train at night with me, right?”

“Eh? Where’s this coming from?”

“I know our last session didn’t exactly go that well but...” Maki glares down at her feet. “I haven’t put you off continuing, have I? I know I was the one who stormed off but...”

“I, uh, thought it would be for the best if I didn’t bring up training for a couple days,” Kaito admits. “It felt like you and Shuichi were on completely different sides about doing it.”

“We are,” Maki responds. “And I probably could have handled everything better the other night but...I didn’t. I just...thought Saihara felt the same way as me. I didn’t expect him to want to leave so quickly and to think that...”

“That?”

“We don’t need to train anymore,” Maki says. “It’s just, we can still train *without* a purpose, right?”

Before, we trained to grow stronger. Now I want to train so I can be around..." She quickly turns her head to the side.

"So you can be around your friends again, right?"

"...something like that," Maki mildly agrees.

Since he's been so busy preparing his party, he's never had a chance to talk to Maki until now. Has this been eating away at her all this time? "Look, it's my bad that you haven't been able to tell me this until now. I just kind of presumed you needed some space. That night ended so badly that I thought I'd do something to cheer you along with everyone up, that's why I threw this party. I thought you might've wanted to take a break from training for a while."

"Training with you is all I've thought about these last couple of weeks," Maki admits. "When I realised you weren't actually...dead, I just constantly thought about our training sessions and how much I wanted to do them again."

"Then let's keep them going," Kaito says. "Let's train every night until it's time for us to leave!"

Maki doesn't seem too surprised by his spontaneous idea. If anything, she seems happy. Before she can respond there's suddenly a hand tugging at Kaito's arm urgently.

"Kaito! You've got to come with me!"

Kaede all but yanks Kaito from his seat and onto his feet. Before he can ask her what's wrong, she's dragging him upstairs so quickly that he almost trips. He spares a look at Maki's bewildered expression before allowing himself to concentrate more on Kaede. He can't see her face so he's not sure if her urgency has been born from excitement or fear. However, she wouldn't be dragging him up the stairs if it wasn't for an important reason, right?

Suddenly, he feels nervous. Did something happen? He knows that he was playing with Maki for a while but *surely* nothing bad happened during that time, right? He wishes Kaede offered him a little information before snatching him away.

They reach the top of the stairs and the nervousness he feels turns into a queasy stomach ache. What's she going to make him look at?

"Look!" Kaede says breathlessly.

There's an excited grin on her face. She points a finger at the casino entrance, aiming her finger specifically at...

"Holy shit, you're both here!" Kaito's nerves immediately settle as he spots Kokichi and Angie standing in the doorway.

—

Kokichi spends a lot of his time in the office zoned out on a chair in the monitor room. Sometimes he absentmindedly watches everyone, too tired to actually take in what's happening. Kiibo dutifully sits by him most of the time. If he's not next to him then he's tending the pods to make sure there are no issues.

Kiibo has been more quiet than usual lately. Kokichi can actually pinpoint the *exact* moment when the robot started to talk less. The moment the scheduled time for Shuichi's negotiation was missed, Kiibo suddenly became more tense, despite all the claims that he can't feel anything. It's like Kiibo

can't understand that he's worried. Kiibo blames his silence for not having anything to say.

When Kiibo *does* speak, it's usually to encourage him to go to Kaito's party. Every time he suggests he should go back into the simulation, Kokichi takes it as his cue to start being the silent one instead.

There's a constant bothersome feeling of anxiety bubbling in his stomach. He knows the longer he leaves it to fester, the worse he's going to feel. Kokichi, however, hasn't felt *this* helpless before. It's like every option he has at the moment is as bad as each other. He doesn't find *anything* appealing at the moment.

The thing is, there's something nauseating about watching everyone wear fake smiles. Every single person in the simulation is *pretending* that everything is okay. Well, he thinks a couple of people are genuinely coping with their shared predicament but not many. Every sunny smile he spots always vanishes as soon as someone is left alone.

He thinks Kaito might be the worst culprit of them all. When surrounded by people, he shines brighter than the sun. He becomes the gravity that keeps everyone from drifting apart.

When he's alone, his smile is eclipsed by a drained look of exhaustion. His shoulders sag like he's trying to balance the weight of the world on them. The sparkle in his eyes fades and the so-called Luminary of the Stars looks like a mere puppet lost without its owner.

Kokichi has to admit that he's impressed by how quickly Kaito can slap on a mask when he needs to and pretend that everything's okay in a heartbeat.

He can understand the logic behind throwing a party. If a leader wants to raise his group's morale then sure, a party *is* usually a safe choice. In this situation however, it just feels like slapping a plaster over an infected stab wound. It doesn't help that most people are going so they can pretend that everything is okay just for a couple of hours.

Kokichi thinks that people who aren't *good* at lying really *shouldn't* try to lie to themselves for long periods of time. In fact, if someone can't lie then they shouldn't altogether. Lies can be sickeningly enticing and addictively sweet. Lies can be like a box of chocolates. You can tell yourself that you'll only eat a couple but once you've reached your cut off point you'll think, *oh*, okay then, just *one* more and before you know it the entire box is gone.

He's someone who plays around with lies. He can spill them from his lips as naturally as breathing. A liar knows what lies are capable of. He knows more people than not would rather hide behind one than face the truth.

Here's the funny thing. He also knows how *self righteous* people can be. Most people *hate* being called out if they ever get caught lying. In fact, most people don't even *know* that they probably say *more* lies than truths most days. Lies may have a negative stigma attached to them but that doesn't stop people from believing in them, even if it is to keep themselves sane.

See, Kokichi can already see how everything is going to play out. Shuichi *isn't* going to get *anywhere* with his negotiations and everyone is going to be stuck in the simulation longer than expected. Kaito will keep up his charade about everything being okay and everyone will either blindly believe him or slowly lose hope. The lies will build and build until one day, *bam*, the ugly truth will rear its head and the pretty little lies everyone has wrapped themselves up in will no longer work.

The irony of all this is that Kokichi doesn't actually mind lies.

His character is a seasoned liar. *Of course* he doesn't mind them.

It just really pisses him off when he sees people not being able to lie properly.

Him being pissed off that everyone is lying to themselves isn't the issue though. The issue is that everyone has to lie in the first place. He tells himself that he doesn't care about this random group of strangers, that *they're* the ones who are destroying themselves.

There's only so long he can watch everyone fail to lie so miserably though. Everyone's shoddy lying is starting to get under his skin like an irritated rash.

Kokichi spots something odd about an hour before the party starts. Kiibo had explained to him earlier how the monitors are showing footage recorded by tiny bears with cameras, which is something that Kokichi decided to accept without asking *why* for his own sanity. A couple of the bears must've managed to slip into Angie's Exisal before she shut it and there's a monitor in the corner that is showing what's happening inside the Exisal.

For some reason, it makes him squirm being able to see Angie inside the Exisal. He feels like he *shouldn't* be able to see her, or maybe he doesn't want to be able to see what's going on inside the Exisal. He kind of presumed that since the Exisal is shut, there's no way to see who is inside. Finding out from Kiibo that the tiny camera bears are able to relay footage from inside the Exisal to the monitors makes him feel queasy, like he's somehow managed to overlook something. Apparently, even if someone manages to turn the bears off for a while, the moment they turn back on, they go back to sending footage to the outside world.

But that's not important right now. What's important is that Kokichi is currently looking at a slouched over Angie. For a second, he *swears* she's dead. Then, thankfully, he notices her shoulders steadily rising and falling. She's *not* dead but she's *definitely* worn herself out.

The issue is, no one knows that she's in such a state. Soon, everyone will be at Kaito's party and even then, he doubts anyone will open the Exisal to check on her once it's finished. It's more than likely everyone has taken Angie's lack of response as her being defiant when in reality, she's passed out.

Kokichi *really* doesn't want to go back in but...*ugh*, he can't just ignore her now that he knows something is wrong.

"Kiibo, can you take me to my pod?" Kokichi asks, knowing fine well if he stands up on his own then he'll just topple back over.

Kiibo looks at him as if he's trying to trick him. "You *actually* want to go back?"

Kokichi rolls his eyes. "*You're* the one who's been hounding me to go back for days now. Are you going to help me or not?"

"Of course. I just don't understand what has changed your mind."

Kokichi jabs a finger at the monitor Angie is on, muttering out a quiet *duh* as Kiibo looks momentarily startled. He must've not noticed Angie slumped over until now. At least this gives Kiibo more incentive to hurry up. The robot hooks his arm around his shoulders and guides him to his pod.

He ignores the sickly feeling that burns the back of his throat as the pod door closes. For one second, he's *trapped* and he squeezes his eyes shut, pretending that he hasn't just sealed himself into a space where he can't even stretch his arms out in front of him.

When he opens his eyes, he's in the very same classroom he woke up in the first time he arrived here. He takes a second to examine himself, to appreciate his uniform despite how unique it looks. He prefers his white uniform and his too long sleeves over the dull clothes in the office. He even briefly curls a strand of his hair around his finger so he can admire his plum locks.

Kokichi doesn't bump into anyone on his way to the Exisal. He finds it strange that he's back here, *especially* since he can't even remember leaving but hey, he'll take the fake greenery the simulation has to offer over the stuffy office any day.

He reaches the Exisal and for a second, hums and ahhs over how he can get inside. Then, like a lightbulb has suddenly turned on above his head, he spies a small latch in front of the Exisal and despite not knowing anything about the machine, he just *knows* that pressing down on it will open the Exisal up.

So he does. The Exisal springs open and Kokichi climbs until he reaches Angie, who has surprisingly lifted her head up to stare owlishly at him. She suddenly jerks and presses a button, sealing them both inside just as Kokichi opens his mouth.

"Evening, sleepyhead!" Kokichi coos just as the Exisal shuts back up. He blinks as he's engulfed in darkness. "Uh, *rude*."

"You're...Kokichi, right?" Angie says as she rubs her eyes. "What are you..."

"What am I doing here?" Kokichi pulls a face as he makes himself comfortable, nudging Angie to the side as he fights for space on the only seat available. It's a good thing that they're both small. They both just about manage to fit. He stretches his legs out on top of the control panel and places one on top of the other as he crosses his arms behind his head. "Well, I suppose you could say I came to make sure you're not dead."

"Huh?"

Kokichi pokes her and lets out a satisfied nod. Since there are a couple of dimly lit red buttons on the control panel, everything Kokichi can make out is cast in a dark red. Angie's platinum blond hair now looks like it's a completely different colour. "Yep, you're *definitely* not dead."

For a moment, Angie looks horribly lost. She looks down at her own hands as if she's suddenly become a spirit and for a brief second, Kokichi almost feels bad for teasing her. *Almost*.

"But you *are* tired, aren't you?" Kokichi presses. "I know *much* more comfortable places to sleep than in here. I mean, yeah, the bedrooms here kind of suck but I don't think the beds look that bad."

"Can you be quiet for a second?" Angie murmurs. She digs her palms into her eyes as she continues to rub them. Huh. Either she's taking a while to wake up or she's starting to crack from being stuck in the same place for too long. Hmm, there also *is* the possibility that he's genuinely annoying her but that *definitely* can't be right because he's the least annoying person in the world. He pinky promises that he's not lying.

Kokichi is generously quiet for at least two seconds. "So--"

"Tell Angie the truth. Is everything that Saihara said true?"

Oof. Looks like she's asking the tougher questions right off the bat. It's incredibly bold of her to presume that he knows what she's on about. Then again, with how worn out she sounds, she probably isn't thinking straight right now. She probably remembers that he's been outside all this

time but she's being a little presumptuous over whether or not he heard Shuichi. Lucky for her, he did.

Kokichi hesitates as he takes in her appearance. Angie really doesn't look good. There are dark rings under her eyes and her hair is tousled. It's a miracle that the string keeping her hair tied hasn't unravelled. She doesn't look like the sort of person who can handle hearing the truth right now.

As Angie stares at him expectantly, Kokichi plays with his scarf.

"Oh yeah, the outside world is a *super* messed up place, you know? There's *sooo* much going on. Half of the planet has been taken over by dinosaurs and the other half is flooded, meaning a fish rules the world," Kokichi tells her, keeping his face straight. She looks justifiably dazed. "Nah, just kidding."

"Why would you tell Angie that?" She sounds more upset than he expected her to be. She pouts and turns her head to the side. "If you're just going to lie to Angie then get out."

"*Woah!* That's no way to talk to someone who practically saved your life," Kokichi counters. Okay, so he's exaggerating a *little*. So what? He *did* come to check on her out of concern, at least *that* much is true.

Angie huffs. "Angie was told that everyone who leaves has to stay in an office. There's no way Kokichi would know if the world has been invaded by dinosaurs if he's been in one all this time."

The fact that they're *extinct* should've been a big enough give away that he was lying in the first place. Oh well. "Yeah, you're right. I've been inside a super *boring* office all this time with only Kiiboy for company."

Angie suddenly bristles and Kokichi wonders what he's said wrong *now*. Man, apparently it doesn't matter if he tells the truth or a lie at this point, Angie is going to get pissed at him regardless. He's starting to wish he never came to check on her at all.

"Are you telling the truth this time?"

"*Uuugh*, what do you want me to say?" Kokichi groans. "You're clearly in a very argumentative mood and I don't think my fragile little heart can take a scolding from you."

His response makes her pause. Angie still has her back facing him, curling her body at an angle so he can't look at her properly. "Angie...just wants to know what the actual truth is."

Kokichi raises an eyebrow. He's pretty certain Shuichi covered everything the other day with Kaede. "Eh?"

"Saihara...he's lying, right? Along with everyone else!" Angie presses her lips together tightly before continuing. "There's no way that...he *has* to be lying. Angie *refuses* to accept that..."

She stumbles over her words helplessly. He doesn't know Angie all that well but for some reason, seeing her so upset feels wrong. When he first met her, she had been as sunny as her yellow raincoat. Now she's pretending that she isn't choking back sobs. Each word she says sounds wobbly and suspiciously tearful.

Oh. Oh dear. Poor Angie. She's asking for help from the world's most emotionally constipated guy. Hmm. This is sure to be an interesting experience.

"Why do you think Saihara is lying?" Kokichi asks. He's not going to get very far if he doesn't

know what she's thinking. "I mean, *you* blocked the exit. Doesn't that mean you think he's telling the truth?"

Angie takes a moment to respond. "He's lying because...he *has* to be."

"Because you *want* him to be," Kokichi corrects her, easily reading between the lines. See, here's another inexperienced liar lying to themselves. She wants to believe that Shuichi is lying but nope, Shuichi most definitely did not lie.

Kokichi knows this more than anyone. He can easily imagine the pain in the tips of his fingers from flicking through too many files.

"You don't understand!" Angie fiercely retorts, her hair smacking his shoulder as she whips her head around. "Angie doesn't want to believe that she doesn't have an island to go back to! So...so he has to be lying! And so are you! We're not all trapped in an office! We're..."

"Where are our actual bodies then, Angie?" Kokichi asks. "Once we leave this simulation, where do we wake up?"

"W-Where we belong," Angie answers adamantly with a firm nod.

"Right..." Kokichi raises an eyebrow. "So if that's the case, why haven't you left, hmm? If you think that once you walk into the light, you'll wake up on your island, why are you still here?"

"Because...because her God said it's safer to stay here," Angie answers hastily, acting like she *isn't* tangling herself in her own web of delusional lies. "He said her island can wait because it's too dangerous to leave right now!"

He almost feels sorry for her. Clearly she's spent too much time worrying alone and now has convinced herself that her impossible theories are possible. The horrible truth is that her island *might* exist but the people she remembers living on it are probably not. She clearly cares about her island. He recalls reading about it briefly in her file.

"And why is it too dangerous to leave?"

"You know why it's dangerous!" Angie suddenly insists. "It's because..."

She can't even give him an actual response. He's fairly certain that deep down she knows that she's spouting nonsense but is too stubborn to admit it. She's a rather pitiful sight, curled up inside a machine she barely knows how to use. He knows it'll probably take her a while to admit that she's lying to herself, that the only reason she's inside an Exisal is because she's hiding from the truth.

"I wouldn't say it's *dangerous* outside," Kokichi says quietly, playing with the fraying edges of his scarf. "It's *boring* if anything. But it's not dangerous, *yet* anyway."

"What are you-"

"Hey, do you want to know what the first thing I did was when I was able to move?" Kokichi asks. "I read through every single file inside the office because I thought Saihara was talking absolute bullshit. I mean, c'mon. Simulations? An outside world who encourages killing games? All of that sounds pretty fictional to me yet..."

It's not.

Kokichi lets out an exaggerated huff of air, crossing his arms as he slouches lower into the seat they're sharing. He has to admit, being inside a cramped space is starting to make his skin crawl. "I mean, I suppose things haven't been too bad for me. At least I haven't had to deal with everyone annoying me unlike you, huh?"

Angie lowers her eyes to her hands that are clasped in her lap. "Everyone is *really* angry at Angie."

Kokichi makes a dismissive noise. "I wouldn't take anything personally. Everyone here has basically been given personalities belonging to video game characters. Literally every last one of us is a walking, talking character trope. Of course everyone is going to be acting all high and mighty because we're not like normal people, all our personality traits have basically been over exaggerated to the point of ridiculousness."

"Um..."

"I mean, *I* totally got lucky and got turned into an absolute *delight*," Kokichi says. "But, hmm, let's take Momota for example. He's been given the personality of a know it all superhero so he's literally always going to be foaming at the mouth about making people happy. He's all about creating peace and sappy shit like that. So since you've kind of disturbed his vision of making everything impossibly perfect..."

"Are you saying everyone thinks Angie is a villain?"

"Hmm, I mean, I *suppose* I am," Kokichi responds with a shrug. "Don't worry, everyone always loves a good villain."

"No one likes Angie though. She sees how upset everyone is when they come to talk to her," Angie says. "Angie isn't used to having so many people upset with her! She's used to everyone always listening to her! She...she only remembers what it's like to live in paradise and this isn't paradise! *This is hell!*"

Ah. *Now* he's getting somewhere. Most people would back off seeing someone so upset but if he backs down now, she's just going to go back to hiding again.

"But if we're in hell then why are you keeping everyone trapped here? Isn't hell a super dangerous place?"

"The outside world is worse-" Angie retorts before slapping a hand over her mouth. "W-What Angie means..."

She suddenly bursts into tears, causing Kokichi to startle for a second before letting his face turn purposefully blank. *Whoops*. He was expecting something like this but not so soon.

He's read all about Angie. She's supposed to be a bright and cheerful character who doesn't have a single care in the world. She's an influential person who likes to be surrounded by people who tell her yes all the time. Hell, he's fairly certain he read that she's supposed to block an exit off during the planned game. How ironic. If things were different, he'd probably be observing everyone more closely to see how often they subconsciously do things that mirror the script.

She's probably way out of her comfort zone right now. To be fair, it's basically a miracle that everyone is up and functioning. Kokichi wonders if anyone has actually asked Angie how she's doing and why she's *actually* blocking the exit.

Still, it's not like Angie is entirely blameless. It's just a shame everyone here is either too soft or too extreme with how they want to handle her. Hell, even he's not sure if *he's* taking the right

approach. He only came in to make sure she wasn't dead. Now he's dealing with someone who is crying and Kokichi is definitely the *last* person you want to see when you're upset.

He's the sort of guy who doesn't like to tiptoe around his problems. He likes to poke and prod at his issues until they either solves themselves or turn into something he can manage. He's fairly certain if Angie had started yelling at him instead of crying then he'd feel a little more comfortable because he's used to dealing with angry people. Just annoy them until they combust or leave, simple.

People who are crying though? Hmm. Yeah. Tears. They certainly *do* come out of people's eyes.

Whilst his knowledge about comforting people is rather limited, he *does* know that crying is a good way to relieve sadness. Not that he cries, nope, he's never cried a *single* tear in his life. He does have a basic understanding of why bottling up emotions is a bad idea though. That's why the most logical solution is to just, well, cause the bottle to shatter and let out whatever emotion that has been festering inside.

Sure, it's messy and probably very ugly but it works. Probably.

Angie sniffs as she wipes her face with her sleeves. She's obviously trying to stop crying but it's inevitable that it's probably going to take a while.

"You know what?" Kokichi lowers his voice as a bittersweet smile creeps onto his face. "Between you and me, if I had to pick between staying inside the simulation or going back outside, I'd probably pick the simulation."

"...really?"

Angie stares at him tearfully and he quickly averts his gaze. "I mean, I could be lying. Who knows, that's for you to decide."

They both slouch back. Whilst Angie looks down at her hands, Kokichi stares up at the ceiling quietly. A small part of him understands what she's trying to accomplish. All she knows is that the outside world is horrible. Of course it's only natural she doesn't want anything to do with it. However, since she's the only one willing to take action, that inevitably means everyone is going to see her as a hinderance.

Maybe the two of them are similar in some ways. Kokichi appreciates people who are willing to do whatever they can to accomplish their goals. In a way, he thinks he actually *respects* Angie for taking a stand, despite how inconvenient her actions have been for some others.

"You know, it kind of sucks in here, doesn't it?" Kokichi says as he tries to stretch his limbs but fails. He knows he pushed Angie to cry but he isn't *entirely* heartless. The best thing she can do for herself is to leave, get some proper rest and take some time to collect herself. However, the thought of leaving her alone at the moment doesn't really sit well with him. That doesn't mean he's going to volunteer himself though. He's not very good at comforting people. "I totally think we should go and gatecrash Momota's party and annoy everyone."

Translation: let's go find someone who is more equipped to look after you.

Angie shakes her head. "Angie knows that as soon as she leaves the Exisal, everything will change. Angie just wants...she wants to go home."

She wants to go somewhere that doesn't exist. She knows the moment she leaves, Shuichi will go back to negotiating and one of two things will happen. He succeeds and everyone gets to leave or

he fails and everyone's memories are wiped.

No matter the outcome, the lives everyone thinks they have lived aren't waiting for them outside the simulation.

It's rather daunting.

Kokichi doesn't realise he's zoned out until he literally *feels* Angie staring at him. He clears his throat and responds to her airily. "You do know you can't hide in here forever though, right? I mean, I don't care if you leave or not *buuut* I'm pretty sure there are plenty of people who want to see you. Besides, if I have to hear Saihara whine about you blocking the exit for even *one* more second then I think my ears are going to automatically self-destruct."

Angie pauses and sways slightly from side to side as she thinks. It's obvious that her judgement is skewed because of her exhaustion. She wipes her face one last time, wiping away the last of her tears with a quiet sniff.

"...Angie isn't stupid, she knows her home doesn't exist anymore," Angie says quietly. "For some reason she just *knew* Saihara was telling the truth the moment he told everyone the truth. Angie just...thought that if the outside world is so bad then why don't we stay here? It sounded like a good plan at the time but Angie...Angie knows this place will never be paradise. She just..."

Kokichi listens to her curiously. Since she's been in the Exisal for a while, she has spent a lot of time alone with only her own thoughts for company, which is definitely not a good thing because of how fragile she is at the moment.

Angie smiles sadly. "Angie isn't sorry for what she did. She's only sorry that we're all trapped in hell no matter where we go."

Well that is certainly one way of putting it. What's worse is that he can't even correct her because he knows she's right.

"But..." Angie suddenly reaches towards the control panel. "The only time Angie didn't feel like she was in hell was when...when her friends came to see if she's okay. Angie doesn't understand why but when Himiko and Tenko came to check on her, she felt a little bit better." She pauses. "And when Kokichi joined Angie in the Exisal to make sure she wasn't dead, that also made Angie feel happy."

The Exisal springs open and Kokichi blinks rapidly as he adjusts to not being in the dark anymore. When his sight clears, the first thing he sees is a playful smile on Angie's face and straight away he realises that the two of them might be more similar than he initially thought.

"Angie's ready to leave now," Angie lies.

And because it's a lie Kokichi can work with, he helps her climb out of the Exisal.

—

"I knew you'd both come!" Kaito declares as he drapes his arms over their shoulders and all but herds them inside. He grins excitedly at Kaede. "I *said* that everyone would turn up and I was right!"

Kokichi raises a surprised eyebrow as Kaede suddenly greets him with a quick hug, holding him a little too tight. "I'm so glad that you both made it! I was starting to think neither of you were going to come."

“Well, you know, I planned to be fashionably late from the start,” Kokichi responds, smoothing out his sleeves once Kaede lets him go.

“Momota? Is everything okay?” Maki suddenly appears at the top of the stairs. “Why did Akamatsu suddenly drag you-”

“Harukawa! Look! Everyone is here!” Kaito tells her as he slings his arms back over Angie and Kokichi once more. He’s so pleased that he all but forgets about what happened between Kokichi and Maki the other day. He turns to Kaede with an exasperated laugh. “You scared me there for a second, sidekick! I thought you were going to show me something bad!”

“She clearly has,” Maki grumbles under her breath.

Kaede’s cheeks turn pink as she lets out an embarrassed chuckle. Clearly no one heard Maki. “Ah, sorry! It’s just when I saw them both when I came up to get something to eat, I thought you’d be over the moon to see that *everyone* is here!”

“Eh? Are we special guests or something?” Kokichi asks.

“Well to be honest, out of everyone, I thought you both would be the hardest to convince to come,” Kaito admits before squeezing their shoulders even more. “So you know what? Yeah, you can *both* be my special guests!”

“Wow! Isn’t this amazing?” Kokichi turns to Angie with an ecstatic sparkle in his eyes. “We’re basically VIPs!”

Angie smiles brightly but it looks like she isn’t entirely listening. “Um, where are Himiko and Tenko? Angie really wants to talk to them.”

“I believe they’re both downstairs,” Kirumi says as she makes her way over. “I’m more than happy to escort you over to them.”

Angie seems pleased with the idea and accepts Kirumi’s arm. Kaito watches as she leaves with a slight wobble in her step. “Man, she doesn’t look so good.”

“Did you convince her to get out of the Exisal?” Kaede asks Kokichi curiously.

Kokichi nods. “Yep!”

“Dude, how did you manage that?” Kaito struggles to hide the surprise from his voice. “She’s literally not been listening to anyone!”

Kokichi shrugs with a mysterious smile. “I have my ways.”

“Actually, more importantly...” Kaede crosses her arms with a slight frown. “Why has it taken you so long to get here?! We’ve all been worried about you, you know? We all thought you were going to join us as soon as you were feeling better!”

“Well if you *must* know, I was super duper sick for a while,” Kokichi responds, shaking his fist dramatically. “And I was only well enough to jump back into the simulation maybe an hour ago. You’re such a meanie to think I was purposefully hiding from you all!”

“I-I didn’t say that!” Kaede insists. “Sorry! I didn’t mean to make you feel bad! It only took me a couple of hours to feel better when I first left so I thought it would be the same for you.”

“Nope! I was totally too sick to move for *daaays*,” Kokichi tells her.

“Well, at least you’re here now,” Kaito says, ruffling his hair. He feels a proud sense of accomplishment now that he has everyone he wants at his party. He *knew* everyone would turn up. He ignores Kokichi as he tries to bat his hand away. “I knew no one could resist a party thrown by Kaito Momota himself!”

Kaito can’t lie, he suddenly feels like he’s on top of the world. Everything is going according to plan. Now all that’s left to do is make sure everyone has a fun time, win enough coins to buy the most expensive prize and socialise.

As he heads back downstairs he passes Rantaro, who is heading up them. Rantaro almost looks like he’s in his own little world as he doesn’t register that Kaito is in front of him.

“Hey man, you good?” Kaito asks.

Rantaro blinks before smiling. “I, ah, think I need some air. If anyone asks where I’ve gone can you tell them I’ve just gone outside for a couple of minutes and will be back soon?”

“Yeah, sure!” Kaito pauses. “Nothing’s wrong, right? If you need to talk-”

“I’m fine,” Rantaro insists. “I promise.”

Kaito shrugs before making his way back down. He spots Himiko hugging Angie in the corner whilst Tenko watches with a small smile. Miu and Kiibo are talking to each other, although Kaito can’t help but notice a slight sadness in the inventor’s eyes. In the corner, Ryoma and Gonta are still playing the fishing game. He watches as Kaede drags Kokichi over to the driving game he had played with Maki earlier.

“It seems you’ve somehow managed to host a successful party,” Korekiyo suddenly says, literally appearing out of thin air.

Kaito pretends he didn’t almost just scream and nods eagerly, crossing his arms to hide his trembling hands. “Well of course! I *said* I was going to throw the best party ever and I have!”

“I must admit I almost wasn’t going to come,” Korekiyo tells him. “But then I thought about the headache I would’ve got from you badgering me once you realised I never came.”

“Hey!” Kaito pulls a face before smiling awkwardly. Yeah, now that he thinks about it, he probably *would’ve* pestered Korekiyo over not coming once the party is over. “Well, at least you came!”

“Hmm, yes, well...” Korekiyo looks up the stairs. “You’ve somehow managed to convince everyone to come, although I can’t help but notice that Shirogane isn’t here.”

“I didn’t invite *her*, duh.” Kaito wrinkles his nose. “She would’ve just ruined everything.”

“Most likely,” Korekiyo agrees. “Well, if you will excuse me.”

The anthropologist heads upstairs, leaving Kaito alone. He looks around the room once more and relaxes. As far as he’s concerned, absolutely nothing can ruin his night.

Alright! Time to win some coins!

Rantaro had lied about going outside to get some fresh air. He ends up in the classroom with the flashback light making machine. He sits on top of a desk as he reads through the instructions for a particular memory restoring flashback light.

The thing is, he doesn't really have the heart to create it.

No, he isn't here to make a flashback light, he's not *that* impulsive. It's just, he feels *comforted* knowing that the option exists. He doesn't want to let Kaede down either by making one, especially since she had been so stern about using one.

The truth is, it was getting hard watching everyone hide behind fake smiles at the party. Watching Miu talk to Kiibo about things he couldn't remember felt like someone had punched his stomach. Of course Miu hadn't been purposefully trying to confuse the robot. The sad face she pulled once she realised she was talking about something Kiibo could not recall was hard to look at.

Then when Angie came down and started to talk to Himiko and Tenko, the feeling of sadness grew even more. He could tell that Himiko was trying her best to not fall apart. He heard her struggle to talk, obviously trying to think of a conversation starter that didn't involve something from a past game.

When he saw Kaede and Kokichi near the top of the stairs, he knew he couldn't stick around to watch Ryoma pretend that everything is okay. He knows the tennis player has missed Kokichi and whilst it's likely they will have a happy reunion, Rantaro knows deep down Ryoma will probably start mourning the loss of his friends all over again soon.

The fresh air on the way to the classroom was nice but it wasn't what he wanted.

He's not entirely sure why he feels so...so *guilty*. Is it because he *knows* he hasn't gone through as much as everyone else? He knows he died instantaneously during the first game and survived the second. He also got to leave with Kaede, someone he really cares about. He knows how lucky he's been in comparison to some other people.

He *does* toy with the idea of trying a flashback light out but...he can't do it. He can't make Kaede worry about him.

It's just...it *would* be nice to know if they are actually worth it, if they actually work.

But he can't use one now. He doesn't want to ruin Kaito's party, especially since the astronaut has put so much effort into throwing it.

"Oh?"

Rantaro startles as Korekiyo leisurely strolls into the room with his hands behind his back. *Of course* he zeroes in on the flashback light making machine.

"What are you doing here?" Rantaro quickly asks as he scrambles off the desk. "Did...you follow me?"

"I saw you leave and wondered if something was wrong," Korekiyo admits. "I overheard you tell Momota you were going outside for some fresh air but when I couldn't find you, I must admit I was curious about where you went."

"I..."

"What on earth is this?" Korekiyo asks as he circles the control panel in the middle of the room

like a hawk. He then turns his attention to the screen on the wall, his eyes zooming from side to side as he reads through everything at an incredible pace. “Oh my...”

“I was just going through some different options because I was curious,” Rantaro quickly insists as he heads over to the control panel to switch the screen off. “Although I didn’t find anything important-”

“What on earth are you on about? There is an option to create a flashback light on the screen that restores...memories?” Korekiyo responds almost incredulously. “Amami, I do believe that this is a *very* important discovery.”

“...okay, so it is an important discovery,” Rantaro sighs. “But we shouldn’t try to make one-”

“Why not?” Korekiyo arches his brow as he delicately runs his fingers over the control panel. “This is *exactly* what we need right now. If we can restore our memories then we’ll be able to figure out if Saihara is telling the *actual* truth about the outside world.”

“Eh?” Rantaro blinks before frowning. “Shinguji, what are you on about? What Saihara told everyone *is* the truth-”

Korekiyo shakes his head. “I think I would remember signing up to join something like this. No, what Saihara told us doesn’t sit right with me.”

“Using a flashback light isn’t going to give you the answers you’re looking for,” Rantaro tells him. “They only restore memories that were made *inside* the simulation. All you’re going to remember are past killing games and I really-”

He flinches as Korekiyo carefully presses a button which causes a flashback light to be created. The locker behind him rumbles and Korekiyo instantly turns his attention to it.

“Amami, I’m not sure why you’re so reluctant to use one. In fact, I’m not sure why you seem so fearful,” Korekiyo admits. “Do you actually know how many memories the flashback light restores? If you haven’t used one then you won’t.”

“If you want to use a flashback light to see if you remember signing up for the killing game then you’re wasting your time,” Rantaro insists. “I can confirm myself that Saihara is telling the truth about the outside world. There...really is no reason for you to use one.”

Korekiyo hums. “I disagree. Something isn’t right about all this and if I can restore my memories-”

“How can you trust the machine even works?” Rantaro asks. “I mean, it might be something Shirogane made to trick us-”

“With how nervous you’re acting, I think you know that this machine is the real deal,” Korekiyo says. “And I must admit that there’s something...*familiar* about these.”

Korekiyo lifts the flashback light from the locker and examines it closely.

“Besides, if I use this and remember my family over and over again,” Korekiyo says as he thumbs the switch lightly. “Then that has to mean that they’re real.”

“Shinguji, you really shouldn’t-”

There’s a surprisingly desperate look in Korekiyo’s eyes as he spares a glance at Rantaro then at the flashback light. Korekiyo must be feeling more helpless than he’s letting on if he’s going to use

a flashback light without any hesitation.

Rantaro doesn't get the chance to warn him about what might happen if he turns it on.

Light fills the room and everything twists and turns and wiggles and squirms.

Rantaro blinks as he barely manages to catch himself on a desk. All he can hear is static and the sound of someone screaming as if they're being boiled alive.

Final Loop - Chapter 3 Part 1

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry that this chapter took so long to write! It just did not want to be written ahaha.
I'm glad I'm finally able to post it!

Thank you all so much for reading! I hope you all enjoy!

Sorry if there's any mistakes!

Kaede must admit that she finds Kaito's party really fun.

It's a welcome change and she also appreciates that she doesn't have to worry about Monokuma popping out of thin air any time soon. There is a *slight* underlying feeling of guilt that follows her throughout the evening. A big reason why she came to the party is so she could distract herself from everything that's going on. A part of her feels like she needs to be constantly fretting about the outside world. The rational side of her, however, knows she'll only end up destroying herself if she lets her anxiety build up too much.

She can't lie, she wasn't expecting *everyone* to come. Seeing both Kokichi and Angie upstairs when she went to grab a drink was both a shock and a happy surprise. She didn't expect Kokichi of all people to be the person to get Angie out of the Exisal but she's not complaining.

Angie looks like she could do with a week long nap. She's currently talking to Himiko and Tenko. Well, more so she's listening to the magician talk. Himiko's cheeks are bright red from talking too much without taking a break.

Kaede turns to look at Kokichi. They've both just finished playing a round of the driving game. Kokichi won by just a second, which doesn't really bother her. What bothers her is that Kokichi doesn't seem bothered about his victory. He doesn't even acknowledge the monocoins that shoot onto his lap. Kaede wonders if she should talk to him but spots Ryoma and Gonta start to approach. Ryoma looks slightly hopeful whilst Gonta has an oblivious smile on his face.

She slips away as the three of them start to talk, making her way over to Kaito. She doesn't think it's her place to eavesdrop, especially since she has a feeling Ryoma has quite a lot he wants to say.

Kaito is currently playing a rock breaking game, a focused look on his face as he breaks several pink rocks in a row. Kaede watches quietly, leaning on the side of the arcade machine.

"Hey!" Kaito turns his attention away from the screen for a second and offers her a smile, which Kaede returns warmly. "How's my sidekick doing?"

"Pretty good!" Kaede glances around the room. "You must be happy that everyone came, right?"

Kaito nods cheerfully. "Hell yeah I am! I knew I'd end up with a full house."

Kaede smiles before pausing. "Did some people leave? It's a little less busy down here than earlier. I would've thought if anything, it'd been more lively now that Angie and Ouma are back."

“Really?” Kaito spares a glance over his shoulder before frowning. “Huh...you’re right.” He shrugs. “Maybe a bunch of people went upstairs to get some food? I wouldn’t worry too much, sidekick.”

He’s probably right. Still, that doesn’t stop Kaede from continuing to search the room. She spots Himiko, Angie and Tenko talking together as a group. Nearby are Kokichi and Ryoma, who are having a slower conversation near the driving game. Next to them is Gonta, who is examining a steering wheel with great fascination. Miu and Kiibo are chattering away by a slot machine. Aside from that, there’s no one else Kaede can see.

“Have you seen Rantaro?” Kaede asks. She does another quick scan of the room in case she has simply missed him. “I don’t see him anywhere.”

“Oh! He told me earlier that he wanted to go outside for some fresh air,” Kaito tells her. “He did look a little pale, although I’m sure he’s fine. Maybe the flashing lights from the slot machines started to bother him? Either way, he said he’d be back soon.”

Kaede bites down on her lip. Now that she thinks about it, the last time she saw Rantaro, she did think he looked a little peaky. Maybe he’s someone who struggles to be in a room with flashing lights for prolonged stretches of time?

“I think I’m going to check on him,” Kaede decides. She doesn’t want to come off as overbearing but she doesn’t like the idea of Rantaro struggling alone. “If it looks like he’s not doing good then I think I’ll walk him back to his room.” The pianist grimaces apologetically. “I know you’ve put a lot of effort into this party but...”

“Nah, I get it,” Kaito says. He turns away from his game completely. Kaede notices the words *GAME OVER* are currently blinking over and over again on the screen. “No point dragging him back if he’s not feeling well. It’s a shame though, the whole point of this party was to cheer everyone up.”

Kaede smiles helplessly. “I’ll definitely bring him back if he seems okay! But if he’s not...”

Kaito laughs awkwardly. “Ah shit, I wasn’t trying to make you feel guilty, sidekick. My bad. If Amami isn’t feeling good then I’ll just have to accept that, can’t get pissed off over something he can’t control.”

“There’s still a chance he’s fine,” Kaede adds with a hopeful grin. She grabs the straps of her backpack as she turns towards the stairs. “Either way, thanks for throwing this party! It was fun! We should definitely throw another one some other time!”

Kaito’s guilty smile transforms into something more proud. “Of course it was fun, *I* organised it!” He slams his fists together. “And yeah, once all this Danganronpa shit is sorted out, let’s all meet up again! I’ll throw an even *better* party!”

His enthusiasm is infectious. Kaede finds that there’s a smile on her face as she heads upstairs and out of the casino. She sighs as she steps into the cool air. It’s not cold, per se. With so many people in the same area at once, the casino ended up becoming warmer than expected. Kaede wipes her forehead and looks around, hoping to spot Rantaro nearby.

“Rantaro?” Kaede takes a few tentative steps forward, her smile slipping as she realises she’s alone. She pauses and ventures further out, continuing to hold her bag straps tightly. She spares a glance over at the hotel but doesn’t spot anyone near it.

Huh. Maybe he left the area altogether? Kaito wasn't very specific when he said Rantaro had gone outside. Kaede's lips thin as she marches towards the exit. She has no reason to worry, right? She can't imagine anything bad happening to Rantaro in the span of a couple of minutes.

She leaves the area and starts to gnaw at her lip as she once again realises she's alone. She looks at the academy and then at her surrounding area. There's still no sign of Rantaro.

Okay, maybe she's allowed to start to worry now. If he's not here then where else could he be? It's possible that he could've simply gone to his room but Kaito *definitely* said Rantaro wanted to go outside for some air specifically.

"Rantaro? Hello?" Kaede clears her throat before shouting a little louder. "It's Kaede! Kaito said that you needed some air? Is everything okay?"

She feels a little silly for calling out to someone who might not even be nearby. Still, she'd rather feel embarrassed than miss Rantaro altogether. If there is anyone around listening, she knows they're not going to judge her for being concerned. Then again, she'd like to think that if anyone else was around at the moment, they would have responded to her calls by now.

There's still no response. Kaede licks her lips as she quickly starts to dart around outside, checking all the nearby areas for any sign of Rantaro. However, the more she searches, the more confirmation she gets that she's alone. She chews her lip as she stops under the gazebo near the dormitory, a deep frown on her face.

Is it that we've both somehow managed to miss each other? I mean, it is pretty spacious out here. Even though I've been shouting pretty loud, I know Rantaro has a tendency to zone out sometimes so it's possible he just hasn't heard me.

It's a flimsy excuse but Kaede would rather believe in it than indulge in the idea that something sinister is going on. She does one last quick glance around before heading towards the school, wondering if he's gone inside for whatever reason. Just as she's about to open the door, it swings open. Kaede gasps and takes a couple of steps back before a collision happens.

"Ah! *There* you are!"

Her anxiety fizzles away as she spots Rantaro standing in the doorway. He seems surprised to see her. Rantaro looks at her quietly, his skin clammy and pale. Kaede wonders if this is why he left the party, because he's feeling ill. He certainly looks unwell.

He lingers by the door for unusually long, causing Kaede's anxiety to rear its head once more. She notices that he's leaning on the door heavily, as if he's using it as a crutch. For a worrying moment, she wonders if he's hurt. She doesn't see any visible injuries but there's a chance there could be one hidden somewhere she can't see.

"Are...are you okay?" Kaede asks nervously before letting out a sharp shout. As soon as Rantaro tries to take a step forward, he stumbles and barely manages to catch himself with the door. Kaede darts towards him and quickly latches herself onto his arm, steadying him before he ends up on the floor. "H-Hey! Let's sit you down before you fall over..."

She feels him tremble against her grip as she guides him over to the closest bench. Rantaro sits down heavily. Kaede joins him, her hand still wrapped around his arm. Not only does he look bad but he also feels a little warm. She notices that there's a layer of cold sweat building up on his forehead. Rantaro must be pretty out of it if he hasn't wiped it away yet.

“What’s wrong?” Kaede asks carefully. She’s starting to sense that he doesn’t look rough because he’s ill. There’s a haunted look on his face that’s starting to unsettle her and a distant look in his eyes. Kaede wonders if Rantaro is even aware where he is right now. “Hey, you can hear me, right?”

For a moment, she thinks he isn’t going to respond. Thankfully, he offers her a small nod, although he doesn’t drag his gaze away from the floor to acknowledge her. He instead stares at the cracks on the floor like they’re the most fascinating things in the world.

“Are you sick?” Kaede presses, reaching a hand up to feel his forehead. It’s warm but not abnormally so. “Kaito said you had to leave the party to get some air. What were you doing inside the school?” When she gets no response, she decides to press further. “Were you looking for some medicine? You *do* look rather peaky.”

Rantaro shakes his head before croaking out a quiet apology. “I’m really sorry, Kaede.”

“Huh?” Kaede’s brows furrow as Rantaro finally tears his gaze away from the floor to look at her. Well, sort of. She realises that he’s struggling to look her in the eye. “Hey, why are you apologising? You haven’t done anything wrong!”

Even if he has, she doubts he’s done anything *extraordinarily* bad. She struggles to even *imagine* Rantaro doing something horrible in the first place. He’s not that sort of person.

He shakes his head before shielding his eyes by pressing his palms over his face. “I’m just *really* sorry. I didn’t mean for this to happen.”

“...you’re really starting to worry me now,” Kaede says. She lets out an awkward laugh, trying to diffuse the growing tension. “You’ve only been gone for what? Twenty minutes at most? Surely you can’t have gotten yourself into *that* much trouble in that amount of time!”

Even though she’s trying to remain positive, she knows anything can happen in a span of a couple of seconds in a place like this.

“I was in the classroom,” Rantaro says. It doesn’t take Kaede too long to guess which one he’s referring to. She feels her stomach drop. “And I promise I was just looking...I just wanted to read through everything about the flashback lights again.”

“...did you use one?” Kaede asks quietly.

Rantaro swallows, his palms still covering his eyes. “I wasn’t going to make one but then Shinguji came in and...” His hands drop from his face, revealing his pained expression. “S-Shinguji is still up there. I almost forgot. He’s still up there.”

“Is Shinguji okay?” Kaede sneaks a glance at the school as something cold wraps around her lungs and squeezes. “Rantaro, you’re not making any sense. What happened?”

“He just kept screaming,” Rantaro tells her. “I think he still might be. H-He was so *loud*. I couldn’t stay with him. My head...it really hurts.”

Kaede frowns and quickly starts to examine Rantaro’s head for any injuries. Her frown deepens once she realises there’s no injuries for her to find. “Can you tell me where it hurts?”

“The back,” Rantaro responds quietly. “It itches too. All I can feel is blood in my hair. I...I need to wipe it off.”

“Rantaro...” Kaede takes a deep breath to calm herself down. She’s not angry at him. She’s *worried* about him. “You’re not making any sense. There’s no blood on the back of your head. There’s not any blood on you at all.”

“...huh?” Rantaro gingerly starts to feel around the back of his head, running a hand through his hair. When he pulls his hand away, he looks bewildered once he realises that it’s clean. “But I can feel blood. I can *smell* it.”

“But that should be impossible,” Kaede whispers, more so to herself. She looks at the school once more.

“M-Maybe I can clean it later,” Rantaro says. “I remember why I left now. Shinguji needs help. I-I know I shouldn’t have left him but...he was so loud. So much was happening at once. I just remember a flash of light and then...even *more* light before my head started to hurt.” He grimaces as he covers his eyes once more. “I need to find help for Shinguji.”

It’s as if he’s talking to himself. Rantaro stands up and wobbles as he looks around, his face screwing up in pain. He doesn’t get very far before he stumbles and Kaede dives to catch him, landing on her knees as she steadies him midfall.

“I don’t think you should be walking around,” Kaede tells him as she helps him to his knees. He looks at her with a lost expression. She’s not sure if he even knows what’s going on. “Look...I think I know what happened. One of you used a flashback light, right?”

“...ah, that’s right,” Rantaro agrees. He starts to massage his forehead. “I...was too slow to stop him. I stupidly thought I could talk him out of using one but...there was this desperate look on his face. He turned it on before I could warn him about the consequences.”

“Hey...” Kaede frowns at his deprecating choice of words. “Don’t beat yourself over this, okay? Right now, you should be concentrating on feeling better.”

“...need to find something to stop the bleeding,” Rantaro says and once again presses around the back of his head with his fingers. It’s as if he’s searching for an imaginary wound. He tries to stand up again but stumbles. Kaede firmly pushes him back down.

“You’re not going anywhere alone,” Kaede responds. Shit. What should she do? She can’t leave Rantaro by himself but from what he’s told her, it sounds like Korekiyo is suffering alone in the classroom. She doesn’t want Korekiyo on his own either. However, she doesn’t want to leave Rantaro in his bedroom whilst she tends to Korekiyo. She has the feeling Rantaro will start wandering around if she leaves him alone.

Dashing back to the party isn’t something she really wants to do since it would mean leaving *both* Rantaro and Korekiyo alone at the same time. She takes another deep breath and tries to squash her anxiety. Even though there are no appealing choices at the moment, she has to do *something*, even if it means leaving someone alone for a couple of minutes. She quickly makes up her mind. She’ll take Rantaro to his room and then tend to Korekiyo herself.

“I’m going to help you up, okay?” Kaede says as she drapes Rantaro’s arm around her shoulders. “Tell me if you start to feel dizzy or need me to slow down.”

Rantaro hums and Kaede hopes he understands what she said. She slowly rises to her feet, pulling Rantaro along. His legs tremble like he’s a newborn foal but he doesn’t lurch towards the floor again, which Kaede sees as a win. She waits to see if he needs her to stop but once it becomes obvious it’s safe to move him, she starts to walk him towards the dormitory.

“A-Akamatsu? What happened?”

Kaede jumps before checking over her shoulder. She spots Shuichi by the door leading to the casino. There’s a slightly guilty look on his face and Kaede wonders if he left Kaito’s party without telling the astronaut. Kaede has a feeling if she wasn’t currently helping Rantaro stand up straight then Shuichi would’ve snuck off without her noticing. At least the detective has enough compassion to stop and express his concern.

“Saihara, perfect timing,” Kaede says. “Look, there’s no time to explain. I need you to go to the classroom with the flashback making machine. I think Shinguji needs help. I’d go myself but...you know.” She uses her head to gesture towards Rantaro.

“Is Shinguji hurt?”

“Maybe,” Rantaro suddenly answers. He starts to sway, causing Kaede to strengthen her grip on him. “He...he was screaming *really* loud and I didn’t know how to make him stop. He sounded so...pained.”

Shuichi pales and shoots a frantic look at the school. “S-So he *is* hurt?”

“He shouldn’t be,” Kaede tells him before sighing. “Look, can you go and check on him? *Please?* I think both him and Amami used a flashback light they weren’t supposed to and...I don’t think either of them should be alone right now.”

Kaede narrows her eyes as Shuichi tries to subtly sneak a glance towards the hole in the wall. She opens her mouth to prompt him to get a move on but he thankfully decides to do the right thing and runs towards the school.

At least it seems he still has some morals. Still, I should probably check on Korekiyo the first chance I get. I don’t think Shuichi would purposefully do anything to put him in danger but I also think Shuichi’s going to be more distracted than usual now that Angie is no longer blocking the exit.

She feels justifiable perturbed as she walks Rantaro inside the dormitory and to his room. Thankfully, he understands that she needs his keys to get his door open and passes them to her before she can ask. She thanks him and unlocks his bedroom door, guiding him carefully to his bed.

“Sit down, okay? I’m going to get you a wet cloth and something to drink.”

She runs a flannel under the sink and swipes a bottle of water from his coffee table. Kaede returns to his bed and sits on the edge of it, making sure she doesn’t accidentally sit on his legs. Rantaro tries to grab the flannel, presumably to wipe the back of his head. Kaede swerves his grab and instead starts to wipe his forehead, trying her best to stop any loose droplets of water from running down his face.

“There, that should help you feel more comfortable,” Kaede murmurs. She next reaches for the bottle of water and opens it up for him. “You should have something to drink too. That should make you feel a little better.”

For a second, Rantaro looks lost before accepting the bottle. He takes a few small sips, which Kaede watches carefully just in case he starts to choke. It seems he’s finally a little more with it since he’s able to screw the lid back on the bottle without any help.

“So...” Kaede starts to wring her hands together as she hypes herself up to ask him some much

needed questions. “Both you and Shinguji were flashed by a memory restoring light, right?”

Rantaro pauses before nodding slowly. “Yeah, we were...”

“...how? Shinguji shouldn’t even know that it exists in the first place.”

“I messed up,” Rantaro admits quietly, his voice barely above a whisper. He smiles ruefully and starts to fidget with some rings on his fingers. “I...I just wanted to comfort myself. Wanted to see the torch with my own eyes. I needed to know that it *actually* exists and wasn’t just something I dreamt up.”

“But why?” Kaede asks. “I don’t understand. What about the flashback light makes you feel comforted?”

“...the idea that everyone has the choice to use one to get their memories back just feels comforting to me,” Rantaro tells her nervously. He swallows heavily and twists one of his rings so hard Kaede’s surprised his finger doesn’t spin with it. She places her hand on top of his own and squeezes, hoping that’ll be enough to stop him from accidentally hurting one of his fingers. “So many people at the party tonight looked so...*sad*. Sometimes I’d see someone with a lost look in their eyes when they thought no one was looking. Did you hear how many times Iruma had to stop herself from bringing up something Kiibo can’t remember? I don’t know why but...it really started to get to me.”

“But why did you end up going to the classroom? You told Kaito you wanted to get some air.”

“I lied,” Rantaro says. “It probably would’ve been better if I did that instead. However, the moment I got outside, it was like I was on autopilot. It wasn’t until I realised Shinguji was in the classroom with me that I snapped out of it.”

Kaede offers him a grim smile. “And I’m guessing he saw the instructions for the memory restoring flashlight?”

Rantaro nods. “He had one in his hands before I realised what was going on. I...tried to warn him that using one wasn’t a good idea and that he should reconsider but...you can see I wasn’t successful.”

Kaede swallows. If the flashback light really does restore everything then...shit, just how much *did* Korekiyo end up remembering? He’s died *three times* in the simulation. Two times he was punished by Monokuma and one time he was killed. From what Kaede knows, both of his punishments played out exactly the same. She’s not sure if that’s a good thing or not.

“As soon as the light hit my eyes, everything just started squirming,” Rantaro tells her. “For a second, it was like I wasn’t in the classroom. I was everywhere at once. The most prominent thing I can remember is a flashing light. I think I was in the library? I couldn’t see all that well and then...I saw a shadow of a person on the bookcase. They were behind me holding...a ball? Then...”

He instinctively rubs the back of his head and chuckles bitterly.

“The shadow obviously belonged to Shirogane. I remember the shadow having a long skirt and waves of hair...” Kaede squeezes his hand tighter. “As soon as it clicked what she was going to do to me...I felt a fear I never felt before.”

Rantaro turns his head away, hiding his haunted expression. He lets out a tired chuckle before readjusting his hand so that their fingers weave together.

“At least we know that it really *does* restore everything,” Rantaro says quietly. “Well, I think it restores *most* of our memories.”

“Most?”

“There’s one memory that just...sort of censors itself if I think too hard about it, everything just goes silent. All of us are standing in the gym and we’ve just been given...our new clothes? For some reason, we all look...really happy. After that, things get blurry. I think, um, Monotaro uses a flashback light on us?” Rantaro rubs his forehead with a quiet sigh. “I’m thinking that specific memory was made to be purposefully impossible to recall properly. It hurts to think about it too much.”

“Right now, recalling specific memories doesn’t matter,” Kaede reassures him. “If it hurts to think about then try to forget about it. Maybe you’ll remember that memory properly once you’re feeling better.”

Rantaro nods before weakening his grip on her hand. “Kaede, I...I’m really sorry about ruining tonight for you. Momota’s party was supposed to be a fun distraction for us and I ruined it-”

“You didn’t ruin *anything*,” Kaede insists. She tries to lighten the mood. “You know how unlucky we’ve all been lately, if it wasn’t this then something else bad would’ve happened eventually.”

“I shouldn’t have even left the party in the first place,” Rantaro somberly adds. “It’s just...as much as I tried, I couldn’t get the flashback light off my mind. I wasn’t intending on actually using one tonight.” His hand goes slack. “But I was thinking about using one at some point.”

“...really?”

“Who better else to try one than the person who died first in the first game and survived the second one?” Rantaro says. “Out of everyone here, I’m the one who would remember the least, so therefore would suffer the least trying one out-”

“No one should have to suffer in the first place!” Kaede redoubles her grip on his hand. His rings dig into her skin. “And don’t act like what you went through isn’t relevant! You shouldn’t feel guilty about how much time you spent here compared to everyone else! It’s not your fault that you spent less time here than most people! That doesn’t take away from the fact you still went through something horrible!”

“Kaede...”

“You *died*,” Kaede tells him. She feels a lump start to grow in her throat. “And that’s one of the *worst* things that can happen to someone! What was it you said earlier? That when you saw Shirogane’s shadow in the library, you felt a fear you didn’t think was possible? No one should *ever* have to feel something like that!”

She swallows heavily as she tries to calm herself down.

Does he not realise that I feel guilty too? That I feel awful that some people here have spent weeks experiencing hell whilst I got off lightly? I don’t want us all to start resenting each other just because some people here haven’t had to go through as much as others. I don’t want to turn suffering into a competition.

Kaede looks at Rantaro sadly.

Maybe I shouldn’t have kept the flashback lights a secret. I’m sure if people knew about them, they

wouldn't have expected Rantaro to test one out. It hurts that he thinks he needs to make it up to everyone for going through less.

"Ah, I've really messed up, haven't I?" Rantaro says ruefully. "Making you cry was the last thing I wanted."

"Eh?" Kaede touches her face softly and is surprised when she feels that her cheek is wet. She frantically wipes her face with her sleeve. "When did I start to-"

"I'm not sure," Rantaro says. "But you're crying because of me, aren't you?"

"Hey!" She leans forward so he has no choice but to look at her. "Stop blaming yourself for everything! I'm crying because I'm...I'm *frazzled*. I wasn't expecting to find you in this state and...it caught me off guard, that's all. I'll be fine in a couple of minutes! I promise!"

"You don't have to pretend that everything's fine to make me feel better, you know? At least let me take some responsibility for my actions. We both know you wouldn't be crying right now if it wasn't for me."

"...I'm not crying because of you. I meant it when I said I was frazzled," Kaede says. "And okay, yeah, a part of me *is* frustrated that you're in this state but I think I'm more frustrated with *myself* for not taking the flashback lights more seriously. *I* was the one who told you and the others to keep quiet about them. I...should've been more responsible and acknowledged them more seriously."

"And I shouldn't have gone to the classroom in the first place."

"...we're just going to keep going around in circles, aren't we?" Kaede says with a weak smile.

Rantaro nods, chuckling softly. "It seems so."

"Maybe we should just accept that we both made some bad choices and promise to try harder from now on," Kaede suggests. She eyes the flannel on the bedside table and sighs. "And here I thought I'd be more prepared to join the simulation this time around. I think I was sort of hoping we wouldn't have to acknowledge any issues that appear because we'd get to leave sooner rather than later."

"Hmm, I don't think things are ever going to be that easy for us," Rantaro responds.

"Yeah, it was wishful thinking," Kaede says. She chews her lip and looks at the door. "Hey, will you be okay for a couple of minutes if I go and check on Saihara and Shinguji? I just want to see if they're both okay."

Rantaro winces. "Ah, that's right. I can't believe I almost forgot about Shinguji...again."

"In your defence, you do have a lot of memories to contend with right now," Kaede tells him. She checks to make sure his water bottle is in reaching distance. Once she spots it on his bed, she feels satisfied enough to leave. "I'll be back soon, okay? Try to get some rest. I'll try not to wake you if you're asleep when I get back."

Rantaro offers her a small smile as she leaves. She steps out of his room as quietly as she can, closing his bedroom door gently. She wipes her face once again with her sleeve, hoping to hide the fact that she was crying only a couple minutes ago.

"Ah, Akamatsu?"

Kaede jumps before spinning around on her heel. She spots Shuichi by Korekiyo's room. The anthropologist's door is shut.

"Oh! I wasn't expecting you to be here," Kaede says as she gives her face one last quick wipe. "Is Shinguji okay? I was going to check on him myself but, well, you saw that I had my hands full."

"He's...extremely out of it," Shuichi tells her. He looks justifiably confused. "I saw that there was a flashback light on the floor near him and that the machine was set up. The screen was blank though, so I'm not entirely sure what sort of memory the two of them gave themselves."

"I do," Kaede responds, swallowing nervously as Shuichi's eyebrows raise incredulously. "There's, um, a flashback light that's capable of restoring everything, like, literally *every* memory made inside the simulation."

"There is?" Shuichi blinks before putting a hand to his head. "I had no idea. I knew the machine was capable of creating memories but not *restoring* them."

"The option is hidden really well," Kaede says. "Something to do with it being an emergency flashback light in case someone manages to successfully use the Necronomicon."

Shuichi shoots her a bewildered look. "Really? That's...*wow*, Shirogane really did have every possibility planned out. I wonder if I would've found that option if I had more time. I was under the impression the machine was only capable of creating false memories."

"More time?"

"It's...a long story," Shuichi admits. "And we have more important things to discuss, such as why both Amami and Shinguji were flashed by a memory restoring light." He gives Tsumugi's bedroom door a wary look. "Do you think she has something to do with it?"

Kaede shakes her head. "I'm pretty sure I know what happened. Shirogane wasn't involved, surprisingly enough. It'll take too much time to explain everything. All that matters right now is making sure Rantaro and Shinguji are okay. Rantaro seems pretty shaken up and I'm presuming Shinguji isn't doing good himself."

"He wasn't screaming when I found him," Shuichi says. "He was completely zoned out. Even when I grabbed his arm to move him, he didn't say anything. I think he's currently processing everything he remembered, which is quite a lot if he now remembers *everything*."

"Do you think he needs someone to stay with him?" Kaede asks. "I don't like the idea of either of them being alone tonight."

"I...really don't know," Shuichi responds helplessly. "I tried to get him to talk but he wouldn't say a word to me. I checked him over and I didn't see any visible injuries so I don't think he's hurt. I just think he's...dealing with a lot."

"...still, I don't think he should be alone right now," Kaede says. She fumbles with her backstraps as she thinks. The truth is, she wouldn't say she's particularly close to Korekiyo. In fact, she's not sure how he's going to react if he looks at her right now. She was one of the last things he saw before he died during her game. She doesn't want her presence to remind him of that tense moment. "Hey, were you friends with Shinguji at any point?"

Shuichi shakes his head meekly. "We spoke a couple of times during my game but I wouldn't say we were close. In fact, I'm not sure *who* I would say his closest friend is. He never really went out of his way to befriend anyone during my game. I think the person he spoke to the most was Tojo

and that was to ask her to organise some scrolls with him.”

Kaede pauses. She knows Korekiyo has a rather interesting history with females. She doesn’t want to villainise him but she’s not sure sending Kirumi to check on Korekiyo by herself is the smartest idea. She wants to trust that he won’t hurt anyone but...she’s not sure what’s going through Korekiyo’s head right now.

“I think he was also friends with Gonta,” Shuichi adds. “They occasionally talked about the different species of insect Gonta had in his lab. I don’t think Shinguji really cares about bugs but he did always wonder why Gonta had such a huge interest in them.”

“Then perhaps we should find Gonta and Tojo and ask them if they can check on Shinguji together,” Kaede says. She isn’t sure if sending just one of them would be the smartest idea. Both of them *together* seems like a better plan. Kaede doesn’t like that she has to be cautious but she’ll do whatever she can to prevent anything bad from happening.

“The last time I saw them both, they were still at the casino,” Shuichi tells her. “I, um...I’d get them myself but...”

“You don’t want Kaito calling you out for leaving his party early,” Kaede finishes for him, crossing her arms.

Shuichi’s face quickly turns a soft shade of pink. “It’s just...I’ve been waiting for Angie to move for ages. I...I really need to get back to the office and do some damage control. I was supposed to have a negotiation with Team Danganronpa the other day and-”

“Surely making them wait a couple more hours won’t hurt,” Kaede says. “What’s the point hurrying back when you’re already late?”

“It’s not that simple. If they think I’m ignoring them, they might lose their patience and break into the office,” Shuichi responds. “I know it’s a horrible time for me to leave but...there’s nothing I can personally do to help at this point. If Team Danganronpa gets into the office then we’re all screwed. I’m...I’m genuinely sorry for leaving you like this but I really need to go.”

“Saihara, *wait!*”

Either he doesn’t hear her or ignores her. Shuichi dashes from the dormitory, leaving Kaede alone. For a moment, the lump in her throat returns and her eyes burn. However, now isn’t the time to crumble.

She knows that Shuichi is right, that his logic is correct. She just wishes things could be easier right now.

—

Kaito shows his prize off to everyone after plopping down the needed amount of coins for it on the counter. Okay sure, he wasn’t expecting the *Key of Love* to become his end goal. However, even though it’s an embarrassing prize, it’s also the *most expensive* and therefore the *coolest*. The fact he has the key in his possession is proof of how *amazing* he is for getting ten thousand coins in such a short amount of time.

“Doesn’t that key only work in the love hotel?” Kiibo asks dubiously as Kaito shows him it proudly.

“I mean, yeah, but that’s not important,” Kaito tells him. “This bad boy cost the *most* amount of

coins! And guess who saved up enough to buy it?"

"You didn't even need to buy it in the first place, dipshit," Miu says. She eyes the key curiously, a strange grin growing on her face. "So, are you going to use it?"

Kiibo raises one of his metallic eyebrows. "Why would he use it? I was under the assumption that people go to love hotels in pairs? I don't think Momota has anyone he can take with him so what's the point of him going?"

Kaito quickly removes himself from the conversation as Miu starts to snort, her laughs echoing around the room. She somehow manages to be louder than the slot machines, which are pretty loud in the first place. He speedily makes his exit as Tenko, Angie and Himiko look at him strangely.

"Eh? Are you running away from your own party?"

Kaito spots Kokichi sitting on the stairs, leaning against the railings. He must've finished his conversation with Ryoma and Gonta. Kaito spots the two of them playing the racing game together.

"A man never runs away from anything!" Kaito insists before sitting down next to the smaller male. He's far away enough from Miu that he can't hear her laugh anymore. "So, you having fun?"

"Define fun," Kokichi says before sticking his tongue out. "The type of parties I'm invited to usually involve a lot of drinking and a lot less clothes."

"...eh?" Kaito stares at him before squinting his eyes. Kokichi must be lying, *right*? Do Ultimate Supreme Leaders usually go to those sorts of parties? But Kaito can't provide shit like that! Well, he knows Miu has a flask of alcohol in her pocket but he thinks Kirumi would be more than unimpressed if everyone leaves his party drunk.

Kokichi snorts at Kaito's baffled expression. "Just kidding! Spaceman's party is...*interesting*. Certainly a strange change of pace after the last couple of days."

"Yeah, well it's about time we all had some fun," Kaito says. "I think everyone deserves a break, don't you? With everything that's been going on..." He pauses. "You do know what's been going on, right?"

"About us all being characters and the shitshow that is Danganronpa? Yep! I know every single detail about everything!" Kokichi chirps, sounding way too cheerful. He cups his face in his hands as he rests his elbows on his knees. "Honestly, I'm super impressed that no one is actually having a breakdown right now. I think the situation we're in is *sooo* ridiculous that everyone's brains have fried, which is why no one is freaking out."

"No one is freaking out because my sidekick has everything under control," Kaito responds. "He's going to fix everything, you know?"

"Really?"

Kaito nods. "Absolutely! Every single sidekick of mine is capable of absolutely anything! Just you watch, we'll be out of here by the end of the week!"

"...hmm, is that so?"

"Yeah, if my sidekick says he has everything under control then that means everything is under control!"

Kokichi looks at him curiously and Kaito suddenly feels like he's being scrutinised, like he's a tiny insect under a microscope. He doesn't like that he's not sure what Kokichi is thinking. His tone suggests that he doesn't entirely believe Kaito. Usually Kaito would confront someone if he doesn't like their tone of voice. However, just for tonight, he'll give Kokichi the benefit of the doubt since Kaito doesn't want to put himself in a bad mood at his own party.

Besides, after all the shit Kokichi has been through recently, Kaito supposes he'll go easy on him for now. It's nice to see that Kokichi is looking better. The last time Kaito saw him in the simulation, he was sick with Despair Disease. He had felt boiling when Kaito carried him over to the exit, arms weak around his shoulders.

He wonders if Kokichi remembers anything. Since Maki doesn't, Kaito has a feeling Kokichi won't either. If he does, well, he must have a pretty solid poker face since he paid no attention to Maki when she was upstairs.

"Hmm? What's that in your hand, spaceman?"

"Oh, this?" Kaito holds out his prize with a victorious grin. "This is the most expensive prize available!"

Kokichi looks rather amused as he leans in closer to get a better look at the key. "Did you seriously win enough coins to buy it? You could've just taken it if you *really* wanted it."

"But that wouldn't have made winning it as fun," Kaito insists. "Besides, it's easier to enjoy something you've won when you know you've earned it." He dangles the key from his fingers. It glistens almost mysteriously under the blue lights.

"Hold on a second." Kokichi leans in even further, his nose almost touching the key. Kaito makes a big deal out of pulling it away. "That key looks super familiar."

"You probably saw it on the prize counter," Kaito says. "There were quite a few of them."

"I didn't look at the prize counter when I arrived," Kokichi tells him. He rubs his chin before snapping his fingers. "I got it! Your prize can only be used at the love hotel across from us, right?"

Kaito shushes him. Even though he hasn't hid the fact he is now in possession of such a scandalous key, there's something embarrassing about how nonchalant Kokichi is acting. A part of him thinks Kokichi is being loud on purpose. "At least have some tact, dude! *Yes*, this can only be used in the love hotel. That's why it's called the Key of Love."

"That's kind of a stupid name," Kokichi says. "Wait, hold on. Did spaceman win this key on purpose?" He gasps, morphing his expression into something teasing. "Or does he have some other ulterior motive he's hiding from everyone?"

"I won it because it was the most expensive prize available," Kaito huffs. "That's all."

"Oh? Is that what you've been telling people?"

Kaito elbows him. "It's true!" He starts to pout. "Starting to wish the prize was literally anything else. Iruma's already laughed at me for winning it and now *you're* teasing me."

"I mean, you're the one shamelessly going around showing people a key that can literally only be used in a love hotel," Kokichi points out. He leans back with a satisfied huff. "So, does spaceman have any intention of using it? I mean, it's kind of a weird time for you to want to get your rocks off but whatever floats your boat--"

“I literally told you why I won it!” Kaito hastily shoves the key into his pocket, acting like if it’s out of sight then it’s also out of mind. “Get your head out of the gutter, man.”

“I don’t think it’s *my* head that’s in the gutter right now,” Kokichi responds. He starts to drum his fingers slowly against his face. “So, spaceman. What do you think of Hoshi?”

“Eh?” Kaito blinks, wondering why Kokichi brought Ryoma up all of a sudden. “Well I really admire him, he’s one of my childhood heroes. He’s also one of my sidekicks!” Kaito cocks his head to the side. “Why do you want to know anyway?”

“Well he was telling me about how we used to be friends,” Kokichi says. “You, me, him and Chabashira.”

“Oh yeah! He mentioned that the other day!”

Kokichi peers over at Ryoma and Gonta quietly, his eyes slightly narrowed. “Hmm, maybe he’s telling the truth then.”

“Huh? Do you think he’s lying?”

“It’s more so...” Kokichi wrinkles his nose. “What Hoshi said was *sooo* confusing that I had to come over here and sit down because my head started to *really* hurt! He’s so inconsiderate!”

Now that Kaito thinks about it, he’s pretty sure he felt a little lightheaded when Ryoma brought up that they had been friends once before. He tries not to think about it too much. “I don’t think he meant to give you a headache.”

“Well he *did* and if my organisation was here...” Kokichi suddenly bites down on his lip before shaking his head. “If he gives me another headache then I’m going to have him shipped off to a disclosed location and refuse to tell anyone where he is.”

“You have an *organisation*?”

“I-”

Kaito suddenly finds himself squashed next to Kokichi as Kaede appears out of nowhere, hopping down the steps two at a time. He blinks as she makes her way over to Gonta quickly, talking to him with an urgent look on her face. He then dodges even further to the side as both Gonta and Kaede race back up the stairs, wearing equal looks of concern.

“Are you trying to squash me?” Kokichi huffs, pushing Kaito away once it’s safe to do so. He starts to dust his arms with a pout. “You’re so mean, spaceman.”

Kaito ignores him. “What the hell was that all about?”

Thankfully, he gets an answer rather quickly. Ryoma approaches them both with a frown. “You both okay? I don’t think either of them realised you were on the stairs.”

“Momota crushed me,” Kokichi tells him with a pout. “He’s so rude.”

Kaito shoots him a flat stare before turning his attention back to the tennis player, who thankfully doesn’t look like he actually believes Kokichi. “We’re fine. What’s up with Kaede though? I could’ve sworn she told me she was going to look for Amami.”

“She found him,” Ryoma says before lowering his voice, a conflicted look on his face.

“Apparently something happened involving Amami and Shinguji and neither of them are doing so good-”

“What do you mean something happened?!” Kaito stands up abruptly. Rantaro only left like what, twenty minutes ago? What could’ve happened to both him and Korekiyo in that amount of time? “Are they-”

“Akamatsu didn’t go into much detail,” Ryoma says. “But she wants Gonta and Tojo to check in on Shinguji. Not entirely sure what happened but from the sounds of it, neither of them are hurt. Just...”

“Just what?” Kokichi asks curiously.

Ryoma frowns as he shoves his hands into his pockets. “Apparently both of them somehow remember every game they’ve been in.”

“...eh?” Kaito makes a soft noise of confusion. “How the hell is that even possible?”

“I really don’t know,” Ryoma says. “Akamatsu didn’t stick around long enough to explain. All it took was for her to say that Shinguji needed help for Gonta to start running.”

Kaito turns to look at Kokichi, who shows his confusion in a more subtle way. Whilst Kaito is aware he likely has a bewildered expression on his face, Kokichi only has a slightly raised eyebrow.

“Did Shirogane have something to do with it?” Kaito blurts out.

“She didn’t say,” Ryoma answers. He tugs on his hat with a weary sigh. “I just don’t understand what the hell is going on...”

Kaito stops himself from pacing by gripping onto the staircase bannister tightly. Nothing bad was supposed to happen at his party. Granted, Rantaro and Korekiyo aren’t *at* his party but tonight was supposed to be about keeping everyone happy. There weren’t supposed to be any emergencies or issues.

“Why did Akamatsu ask for Tojo and Gonta specifically?” Kokichi asks.

Ryoma shrugs. “I dunno, something about them being Shinguji’s friends? Like I said, she didn’t really go into detail.”

“I should probably go check on them,” Kaito decides. “It’s my responsibility as group leader to-”

“Akamatsu made it clear that she doesn’t want you to stop the party because of this,” Ryoma says. “Apparently everything is under control, although how she expects us not to worry baffles me.” He peers up the stairs quietly. “More importantly, I’m curious about how Amami and Shinguji got their memories back. Don’t think something like this has happened before.”

“Really?” Kaito falters before shaking his head. Nope, there’s no point worrying. He shouldn’t be scared of wandering into brand new territory.

“There’s been a couple of instances of people remembering individual memories, mostly just snippets though,” Ryoma says. “This is the first time anyone has fully remembered everything, well, if I understood Akamatsu correctly anyway. I’m starting to wonder if I misheard her.”

“Kind of strange that *two* people managed to remember everything at the same time too,” Kokichi

adds. He purses his lips. “Nothing I read in the office mentioned anything relating to this either. What a bummer.”

“What do you mean by that?” Ryoma asks.

Kokichi waves one of his hands dismissively. “Don’t worry about it.”

“Well clearly something must’ve happened to cause this,” Kaito declares, thumping his fists together. His eyes light up. “I know, I’ll ask Shuichi if he knows anything! If there’s anyone who’ll be able to figure all this out, it’s him!”

He looks around the casino eagerly, searching for any sign of the detective. His grin wavers once he realises that Shuichi isn’t downstairs. Oh. Maybe he’s upstairs getting something to eat? Kaito quickly jogs to the buffet, stopping abruptly as he realises Shuichi isn’t upstairs either.

“Eh? Where’s...”

“Did you not notice Saihara sneaking off earlier?” Kokichi asks him, appearing behind him from out of nowhere. Kaito barely manages to suppress a yell.

“What the hell are you on about?”

“Saihara left a while back,” Kokichi says. “He looked super shifty too, kept sneaking glances at you.” His voice suddenly dips. “At first, I wondered if you two had planned to meet up at the love hotel but when you didn’t leave, I realised that Mister Detective had snuck out without wanting you to know.”

“Oh.” Kaito tries to pretend that this doesn’t rattle him. On one hand, he supposes he shouldn’t be surprised. Shuichi had made it blatantly obvious that once Angie was out of the way, he’d leave. However, Kaito thought Shuichi would’ve said goodbye to him at least.

He tries to smother his disappointment with a smile.

“He probably stepped outside to get some air...probably.”

Now that he thinks about it, he hasn’t seen Maki for a while too. Did she also leave? The last time he saw her was when she followed him upstairs after Kaede had taken him to see Kokichi and Angie. Did she slip away whilst Kaito was talking to the leader?

Ryoma must sense his discontent since he offers Kaito a sympathetic look. “You could be right about him getting some air.”

If he was right then Shuichi would be back by now. No, Kaito has a good idea where Shuichi is. He should’ve realised the detective would leave the moment he saw Angie.

“Yeah...”

In the end, he decides to follow Kaede’s advice and keep the party going. Even though Shuichi leaving without telling him feels like a blow to the stomach, what sort of hero loses faith in his sidekick so easily?

He keeps a smile plastered on his face, even when he notices people slowly start to realise that something isn’t right. Whenever someone asks him if there’s something wrong, he quickly reassures them that everything is okay.

Kaede stops him on his way to breakfast the next morning.

The party had lasted a couple more hours after she left. The last people to leave were Miu and Kiibo and that was only because Miu had been engrossed with rigging a slot machine so it was impossible to lose on it.

He had stopped by to see Kaede after making sure the casino was empty. Once he finally tracked her down in Rantaro's room, however, he found her fast asleep. She had somehow managed to fall asleep slouched over on a chair, the top half of her body on Rantaro's bed. He noticed that a blanket had been draped over her shoulders.

Right now, she looks rather apprehensive, her mouth a straight line. She smiles weakly at Tenko as the aikido master walks past to get to the dining room.

"Is everything okay?" Kaito asks. "Hoshi mentioned that something happened last night."

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about," Kaede admits. She checks the hallways to see if they're empty, a serious look on her face. "But before I start, I just want to say that I'm sorry."

"Huh?"

Kaede nervously licks her lips before steeling herself. "A little while back, a couple of us went to check out the flashback making machine that was mentioned the other day. We, um, ended up finding out that there's an option to make a light that restores everyone's memories that were made inside the simulation."

"Oh." It takes a second for all of this to sink in. Kaito stares at Kaede silently before a realisation dawns on him. "*Oh! So that's* what happened last night!" He feels a little better now that he understands what happened. "I *thought* it was a little strange when Hoshi said Amami and Shinguji suddenly remembered everything. I did wonder how that was even possible."

"Aren't you mad that I hid the fact our memories can be restored from you?"

"What? *No!* I could never be mad with one of my sidekicks!" Kaito reassures her quickly. "I mean, yeah, I suppose it would've been handy if you warned me about them earlier. Why did you not say anything until now anyway?"

"So much has been going on lately. I just thought telling everyone would've caused unneeded anxiety," Kaede answers. "Things have been tense for a while and I just had a feeling that if I said something, someone would've ended up using a flashback light without thinking things through properly."

Looks like she had been right to worry. "Let me guess, Shirogane made one and used it on Amami and Shinguji?"

To Kaito's surprise, Kaede shakes her head softly. "The details don't matter right now but Shirogane wasn't actually involved with what happened last night. In fact, I don't think she even left her room at any point."

Oh dear. What a shame. Not. "So if Shirogane wasn't involved then...Amami or Shinguji used a flashback light *willingly*?"

Kaede winces. "Sort of. What matters is that both of them ended up remembering a lot of horrible

things.” There’s a grim yet determined look on her face. “I am sorry that I didn’t say anything until now but last night proves that I was right to be wary of the flashback lights. I think I want to tell everyone about the memory restoring lights just so it’s out of the way. Hiding that they exist in the first place was stupid of me. Maybe if I had brought them up earlier then...”

“Hey, I’m not entirely sure what went down last night but I do know that whatever happened wasn’t your fault,” Kaito says. He squeezes her shoulder. “You made a bad call, that’s all. You had the group’s best interest at heart and that’s all that matters. If anyone gives you any shit over this then I’ll sort them out.”

Kaede’s shoulders slump ever so slightly as she lets out a breath she probably wasn’t aware she was holding. “Thank you, Kaito.”

“You’re my sidekick, I’m always going to have your back,” Kaito reassures her. “Anyway, how are Amami and Shinguji doing?” His eyes go wide. “Hey, now that I think about it, it’s a good thing you went to look for Amami when you did! He must’ve got his memories back literally after he left my party!”

Which is kind of strange now that he thinks about it. He remembers Rantaro telling him he was going outside to get some air. How the hell did he end up getting involved with what happened last night? Oh well, maybe some questions are better off left unanswered.

“I’m glad I found him when I did,” Kaede admits. “Rantaro didn’t look good when I found him. He was trying to leave the school to get Shinguji some help. I never saw Shinguji personally but from what Rantaro and Saihara told me, I think getting his memories back really messed with his head.”

“Wait, you saw Shuichi?”

“Ah, yeah, I did,” Kaede says, her eyes darting to the side. “I, um, saw him whilst I was taking Rantaro to his room. I’m pretty sure he was heading to the office. He stopped to help me though when I asked him to. Well, I guess it’s more like I *told* him to help but he still did anyway.”

For some reason that makes Kaito feel a *little* less shitty about Shuichi leaving so abruptly. “That’s because you can rely on him, you know?” Kaito tells her. “I mean, I know he’s been a little flaky the last couple of days but that’s because he’s been stressed. I know deep down that if things were different then he’d be a lot less, uh, how do I phrase this? All over the place?”

“I...I know that,” Kaede responds softly. “I want to believe in him, I really do...”

“But?”

“...ah, it doesn’t matter,” Kaede says. “There are far more important things for us to be worrying about right now.” She takes a deep breath before slapping her face twice with both hands, presumably to hype herself up. “Like getting everyone onto the same page! I’m not expecting everyone to be pleased that I withheld information from them for so long. I’m just hoping everyone will be in a forgiving mood this morning.”

“Is that why you told Hoshi to tell me to keep the party going?” Kaito teases. “To keep everyone in a good mood?”

“...maybe,” Kaede answers with a slight smile. She turns to the dining room door nervously, grasping her backpack straps tightly. “I have absolutely *not* missed having serious conversations.”

Kaito laughs at her, pushing open the dining room door himself to stop her from dawdling. “I’m

sure everything will be fine!”

“Hmm? What does Momota mean by that?”

Kokichi, along with the rest of the people in the dining room, turn to look at the pair straight away. There’s a couple of missing people. Rantaro and Korekiyo are still in their rooms and Shuichi is presumably in the office.

Kaito is mildly surprised to see Angie wedged between Tenko and Himiko, although he supposes he should be glad to see her. She looks a little better than she did last night, the bags under her eyes less prominent.

Kaede doesn’t take a seat straight away, opting to instead stand at the end of the table, her hands still wrapped tightly around her bag straps. Kaito sits as close to her as he can, offering her an encouraging wink as everyone else turns to stare at her with varying levels of curiosity.

“I, ah, have something I need to tell you all,” Kaede says before clearing her throat. For a moment, Kaito wonders if she’s going to bolt but she stands firm. “Something I probably should’ve told you all sooner rather than later.”

Tenko flinches. “Tenko doesn’t think she can handle another surprise plot twist.”

“Ah, it’s nothing too serious!” Kaede reassures her before smiling awkwardly. “Well, it’s a little bit serious, but it’s something that no one here has to deal with...unless they want to.”

She turns to Kaito, who flashes her a thumbs up.

“Remember how Yumeno mentioned that there’s a machine that can create flashback lights?”

Gonta tilts his head to the side. “Um, Gonta can’t really remember what a flashback light is.”

“It’s a torch that’s capable of giving people memories,” Kaede tells him. “I don’t think you’ve encountered one yet and it’s extremely unlikely that you will.” Once Gonta is happy with her explanation, she continues. “The other day whilst, um...checking out the machine, I stumbled across an option that...can create a light that restores memories, specifically, every memory someone has made whilst inside the simulation.”

Kaito hears everyone start to mumble amongst themselves. When he spots Kaede’s expression, she looks relieved for the chance to take a break.

“And you’re only telling us this now?” Maki asks. Her flat expression makes it hard to figure out how she’s truly feeling.

“She was looking out for the group,” Kaito tells her.

“Yeah, at least it only took her a couple days to drop a huge bombshell on us,” Kokichi adds airily. “Compared to the several, what, *weeks* it took for you to finally help us out?”

Maki’s expression turns sour and the glare she shoots Kokichi is scathing. She must decide that it’s too early to argue because she angles her back to avoid looking at the leader.

Kaito notices Himiko start to nibble on her bottom lip. When they accidentally lock eyes, the magician is quick to snap her head in a different direction. Before he can even wonder about what’s wrong with her, Kaede starts talking again.

“I really should’ve said something sooner,” Kaede agrees, trying her best to play peacemaker. “But I didn’t because...because I didn’t want everyone getting their hopes up. The thing is, the light restores *too* much for anyone to consider using one. When I said it restores everything, I mean *everything*, including memories of dying.”

“Ah...” Ryoma makes an understanding noise despite the frown on his face.

“I’m well aware it’s not my place to dictate what people should and shouldn’t do but I really do think we shouldn’t screw around with the flashback lights,” Kaede says. “In fact, I *encourage* everyone to stay away from them-”

“Um, sorry to interrupt,” Kiibo says as he holds one of his hands up hesitantly. “But how do you know all this?”

“Because last night...” Kaede clasps her hands together tightly. “Rantaro and Shinguji ended up using one.”

“They *did*?” Miu stares at Kaede incredulously.

Kaede nods. “The finer details don’t matter but because they used one, I now know how badly using one can affect someone. I don’t think Rantaro will mind me saying this but he ended up remembering how he died during his first time here. He even remembers the pain he felt before he died. Even though his death was quick, it was enough to disorientate him. When I found him, he...”

The pianist quietly looks at the floor and Kaito wonders if she’s upsetting herself by saying too much.

“What Kaede is trying to say is the flashback lights are more trouble than what they’re worth,” Kaito quickly takes over, causing several people to look at him. Even though he’s not the sort of person to let fear hold him back, he’s not stupid either. If Kaede wholeheartedly thinks the payoff of using a flashback light isn’t worth it then he’s going to stand by her decision. He trusts his sidekick and her judgement.

“Is...there not an option to restore individual memories?” Ryoma asks, a flicker of hope in his voice.

Kaede grimaces as she shakes her head. “It’s a case of all or nothing.”

Kaito notices Ryoma’s expression fall. “Which is why it’s important that we all work together! The people who *can* remember any of the previous games have a responsibility to help out the people who can’t.”

Miu smirks as she lets out a haughty huff. “I suppose if everyone gets on their knees and begs, I might consider helping out.”

“I’ll help with no strings attached,” Ryoma says dryly, causing Miu to pout.

“Isn’t there a slight issue with this plan?” Kokichi leans back on his chair with a thoughtful expression on his face. “It’s not like I can go up to someone and ask for a specific memory since I won’t even know what I’m asking for.”

“Then don’t over complicate things,” Kaito sighs. “You can...you know, ask who you used to hang out with and shit like that.”

“It’s for the best if we stick to doing this instead of resorting to using flashback lights,” Kaede says. “I’m sorry if I got anyone’s hopes up. I just think with how much we’re all dealing with at the moment, I wanted to avoid adding another thing to worry about into the mix.”

Of course Kaito finds it disappointing that he’s not going to get the chance to remember his past selves. It is decidedly for the best though. Rantaro and Korekiyo got their memories back last night and they’re *still* struggling. Kaito doesn’t have time for that. He needs to be at his best at *all* times if he wants to help everyone.

He’s pleased that the group are reacting positively to Kaede’s speech. He’s aware that some people are understandably disappointed. Sometimes taking risks *can* be beneficial but this seems like a risk that isn’t worth it in the long run. Besides, he trusts that his sidekicks and allies will tell him everything he needs to know.

Kaede sits down next to him as everyone goes back to eating breakfast. She talks to him as he starts to pile up his plate.

“Thanks for helping me out,” Kaede says as she reaches for a bowl of strawberries. “Things... actually went better than expected.”

“That’s because everyone knows you’ve got the group’s best interest at heart,” Kaito tells her, lightly nudging her with his elbow. “Although I am surprised Iruma didn’t kick off. She seems like the type of person who doesn’t like it when shit is kept from her.”

“She, um, might’ve already known about the flashback lights,” Kaede tells him, a tight smile on her face. “And Yumeno too.”

“Oh, that explains why she wouldn’t look at me earlier,” Kaito says, remembering how quickly Himiko turned away.

“Rantaro knew about them too,” Kaede adds, a guilty look appearing on her face. “We found the function together. I was the one who told them not to say anything though.”

A part of him is surprised that so many people already knew about them. He tries not to dwell on this revelation too much. “At least you told everyone now!”

“Yeah...” Kaede looks at her bowl of strawberries with a worried look in her eyes. “I just hope no one is tempted to use one. I know it’s not my place to stop anyone but...”

“If someone does then that’s their choice,” Kaito says. He plucks one of her strawberries from her bowl. “I’m pretty sure having to remember dying has put everyone off using one anyway. Certainly has made *me* wary about using one.”

“It just would’ve been nice to give everyone the option to remember some happy memories,” Kaede says wistfully. “There’s no doubt the next couple of days, hell, even *weeks* are going to be tough.”

Kaede yelps as Kaito suddenly drapes his arm around her, pulling her in for a sideways hug. “Even if they are, I’m going to make sure *everything* goes as smoothly as possible! As long as I’m around, no one is going to have *any* reason to worry!”

The pianist blinks before her corners of her lips curl up. “You really do know how to reassure people, don’t you?”

“What sort of hero isn’t able to reassure one of sidekicks?” Kaito responds, ruffling Kaede’s hair

before letting her go.

She laughs as she fixes her hair.

Kaito's pleased that he's managed to make someone laugh so early in the morning.

Kaito doesn't get the chance to leave the dining room before he's approached by someone. Ryoma hovers next to him whilst he drains the last of his coffee. When Kaito spots the tennis player, he abruptly slams his cup onto the table.

"Hoshi! How's it going man?"

"...not feeling the best," Ryoma admits, kicking the floor idly with the tip of his shoe.

"Huh?" Kaito's excitement starts to fizzle as he takes a proper look at Ryoma. The tennis player has a disappointed look on his face and Kaito wonders if it has something to do with Kaede's announcement. "What's up?"

"It's..." Ryoma sighs. "It's about what Akamatsu said during breakfast."

Ah, he thought so. "Are you disappointed about the flashback lights?"

"I suppose I am," Ryoma answers. "Guess I got my hopes up a little too quickly for a second, which was stupid of me. Should've learnt by now not to expect miracles in a place like this."

"Were you hoping to remember something? I don't mind helping you ask around if-"

"It's not *my* memories I'm fussed about," Ryoma says before tugging on his hat. "Ah, ignore me. Shouldn't be bothering you over something like this, it isn't fair-"

"If something's bothering you then of course I want to know," Kaito quickly tells him.

A grim smile appears on Ryoma's face. "Feel kind of selfish for admitting this out loud but for a second, I kind of let myself think that using the flashback lights would be a good idea. That was *before* Akamatsu said it was an all or nothing sort of situation though." He shakes his head with a bitter scoff. "No way in hell is the payoff worth it."

If Ryoma isn't fussed about the flashback lights then that must mean he wanted someone else to use one. With how cagey the tennis player is acting, Kaito wonders if maybe, just maybe, Ryoma was hoping that everyone he was friends with previously would use one. It's not an unreasonable desire. Even though Ryoma isn't acting as depressed as Kaito thought he would considering his background, well, *backstory*, the way the tennis player talks and reminisces makes Kaito think that Ryoma is lonely.

"You're right, the payoff isn't worth it," Kaito agrees. "But that doesn't mean you should give up! If I were in your shoes, I'd be trying to kickstart all the friendships I lost! I know everyone here has the potential to remember bits and pieces of their old memories if they encounter the right thing! Like when I trained with Harukawa for the first time! For a second, I saw both of us and Shuichi training together! It was only an image but it was enough to make me feel *something*, you know? I ended up remembering how much fun I had training with them."

"Only an image, huh?"

“An image is better than nothing,” Kaito says. “Oh! I’m pretty sure it’s possible to remember parts of conversations too! When I was with Ouma by the wall, I suddenly remembered a conversation I had...with him, I think? It was kind of hazy but...” What was it he remembered again? “Something about...sweaty hands!”

“Sweaty...hands?”

“Yeah, it was a weird thing to remember,” Kaito admits with a nonchalant shrug. “Look, I get that you’re disappointed. I would be too. It’s frustrating that I’m stuck with only remembering snippets of conversations and images. Of course I want to remember more! The more I remember, the more helpful I can be-”

“That’s wrong,” Ryoma interjects. “You could have no memories and I’d still be happy to have you around.”

Kaito abruptly snaps his mouth shut as he realises he doesn’t have an instant response. Oh. He wasn’t expecting to hear that. His sidekick...would be happy with any version of him?

“But you’re disappointed about the flashback lights not being an option-”

“That’s my disappointment, not yours,” Ryoma says. “Besides, being able to even *talk* to you again means more than you being able to remember me. I...” There’s a glint of satisfaction in his eyes. “I should’ve realised that sooner. Maybe I shouldn’t have been so hasty about considering the flashback lights. Of course I’m still disappointed but...it’s like you said, I should be trying to kickstart all the friendships I lost. Maybe if I give everyone a nudge in the right direction then...”

It seems Ryoma is dealing with a unique type of grief. He must be finding it strange that he’s able to talk to people he once mourned. Well, still is mourning. I just wish I could remember more. From the sounds of it, the two of us were close before I...left him behind. Fuck, what do I have to do to remember more without using a flashback light? I want to remember more than tiny bits and pieces.

“Hey, Momota?”

“Yeah?”

“Come to my lab as soon as you’re done,” Ryoma says. “And make sure you’re warmed up. I think it’s about time we played a game of tennis together.”

Ryoma leaves before Kaito can stop him. It takes a second for Ryoma’s words to sink in but as soon as they do, Kaito instantly scarfs down the rest of his breakfast and bolts out of the dining room.

He wasn’t expecting to play a game with Ryoma so soon but he isn’t about to complain. If a game of tennis is what Ryoma needs right now then Kaito will play until he has nothing left to give.

Kaito bursts into Ryoma’s lab and is momentarily surprised to see that Ryoma isn’t the only person inside. He must’ve gathered some other people as soon as he left since the astronaut spots a perplexed Tenko standing next to a wide eyed Himiko. Tucked behind Tenko is Angie, who looks a little out of her comfort zone. Finally, Kaito spots Ryoma talking to Kokichi, who seems to be listening to him half-heartedly with his arms crossed.

It’s a rather strange group but Kaito doesn’t exactly mind.

Now that I think about it, didn’t I remember training with Tenko, Ryoma and Kokichi the other

day? Ah, that explains why they're here. I'm not entirely sure why Himiko and Angie are here but I get the feeling it might be because they want to be around Tenko.

"Another male?" Tenko huffs as Kaito closes the lab door behind him. "Tenko thought Hoshi said she would *like* who he invited."

Ryoma rolls his eyes fondly. "I think you'll warm up to Momota being here. He told me he has some experience playing tennis so I think the two of you will have fun playing against each other."

"Hell yeah I have experience!" Kaito agrees.

"Even if you do have experience, anyone who is on a team with Hoshi is already guaranteed to win," Kokichi says. "Which is why I have decided he's my partner-"

"W-What if I want him to be my partner?!" Kaito instantly intervenes.

Ryoma snorts. "We can't be partners if you want to play against me, Momota."

"Oh yeah." Kaito puts his hands on his hips as he once again goes over who is in the room. "How many of us know how to play anyway? I know Hoshi and I have some experience but what about everyone else?"

"Tenko has played before," Tenko tells him. "But she's still not sure why Hoshi invited her. Tenko wasn't actually planning on doing much today." She has a tired look in her eyes. Kaito wonders if it's safe for her to be here. Tennis requires a lot of concentration and he doesn't want Tenko to hurt herself by not paying enough attention.

"Moping around everyday isn't going to do you any good," Ryoma responds, ignoring the half-hearted glare Tenko directs his way. "But I'm not going to force you to play either. Just thought I'd give you the choice since I've personally seen how well you play."

"You...have?" Tenko tilts her head to the side and wrinkles her nose. "But Tenko doesn't remember ever playing with..."

Kaito straight away recognises the distant look that suddenly fills her eyes. It's the same look Kokichi had when they were near the hole in the wall. Thankfully, it doesn't take Tenko long to come back to her senses. She rubs her forehead as her brows knit together.

"Are you okay?" Himiko asks hesitantly, peering up at Tenko with nothing but concern on her face.

"Tenko's...fine. She just has a slight headache," Tenko responds. She scowls at the floor as if it's personally responsible for her pain. "Ugh, she wants to know what the heck just happened to her. Tenko thought she saw herself playing tennis with someone in this room but..."

"It's possible you just remembered part of a memory from a past game," Kaito tells her.

"Eh? How?"

"It just...kind of happens, I guess," Kaito responds, feeling as dissatisfied as she looks with his answer. "I don't think there's an actual explanation."

"...Tenko hopes she doesn't end up with a ton of headaches," Tenko grumbles. She crosses her arms. "Also...Tenko *guesses* she'll stick around to play a couple of games. Someone needs to teach the other girls how to play anyway."

“Hell yeah!” Kaito pumps a fist before turning to Ryoma and Kokichi. “That means it’s up to Hoshi and I to teach Ouma how to play!”

“Who said anything about me playing?” Kokichi asks.

“Weren’t you the one who wanted to be my partner?” Ryoma teases before fetching a couple of rackets over. He hands them out as quickly as he can.

Kokichi pulls a face as he examines his racket. “Well I’ll definitely win if I’m on the same team as you-”

“I think it would be unfair if I have a partner,” Ryoma tells him before pointing his racket directly at both Kaito and Kokichi. “Which is why you’re both going to team up whilst we practice. We’ll do a couple of warm up rounds so we can go over the basics. After that, we’ll play an actual game with the two of you against me.”

Kaito’s eyes sparkle with excitement. “Now that’s what I’m talking about!”

“...you just gotta hit the ball over the net, right?” Kokichi murmurs. He scoops up a nearby tennis ball before clumsily bouncing it over the net with his racket. “Doesn’t seem that difficult to me.”

“If you play against me like that then you’ll have no chance of winning,” Ryoma responds, causing Kokichi’s eyebrow to raise slightly. It’s almost as if he’s amused by how confident the tennis player sounds. “I’d go easy on you both but I doubt Momota wants me to do that.”

“Fuck no, I’ve been dreaming about this moment for years!” Kaito agrees. “When we play, all of us are going to give everything we got!”

“That’s, uh, great and all but I don’t really like to play games I know I can’t win,” Kokichi says, sighing loudly as Kaito straight away opens his mouth to object. “You seriously aren’t about to say that we can win, right? You can’t be that delusional.”

“My parents always told me it’s the taking part that counts,” Himiko suddenly says from across the room. Tenko is currently instructing her how to stand properly. “And it’s not like you have anything better to do, right?”

“I’m also not as good as you think,” Ryoma adds. “I’ve only gotten back into tennis recently after taking a long break from it. Don’t let my Ultimate title fool you into thinking I’m unbeatable.”

“But you’re going to play as well as you can, right?” Kaito presses.

Ryoma nods. “Of course I am. I know I’ll never hear the end of it if I don’t.”

Kaito can sense Kokichi is starting to waver. He’s not sure if the leader is reluctant to play because he’s nervous about losing or genuinely isn’t interested in playing.

Suddenly, there’s a toothy grin on Kokichi’s face and for a second, Kaito feels like he simply imagined Kokichi’s hesitation.

His smile looks kind of forced. I know Kokichi said he was feeling better last night but something just doesn’t sit right with me about how long it took him to rejoin the simulation. I could be imagining things but...nah, it doesn’t matter. It’s not like I know this guy very well. Maybe I’m just worrying over nothing.

“Hoshi has a point! If I leave now then Momota is just going to yell at me until my eardrums

explode,” Kokichi says before twirling his racket around in his hand.

“What?! I wouldn’t-”

“Sorry, gonna have to agree with Ouma on this one,” Ryoma says, causing Kokichi to snicker behind his hand. “You can be really stubborn when you want to be, Momota.”

“Just don’t want Ouma regretting not joining in,” Kaito grumbles defensively. He slams his chest with a determined cry. “Anyway, if you want us to be partners for this game then that means we’re going to be the best damn partners in the universe!”

“Oh wow, looks like Momota has set his standards pretty high,” Kokichi says. He pretends to wipe some sweat from his forehead. “I really hope Hoshi is right about being rusty.”

“I was only planning for us to all play a few friendly games,” Ryoma sighs quietly to himself. He doesn’t seem displeased with Kaito’s enthusiasm however.

“Let’s get started then!” Kaito looks over at the girls. Tenko looks like she’s doing a good job teaching Angie and Himiko how to properly hold a tennis racket. She seems more cheerful than she did when he first arrived. Maybe teaching the other two girls is distracting her from thinking too much?

He goes over the basics with Kokichi as carefully as he can, Ryoma chiming in when appropriate. It seems the tennis player is more than happy to let Kaito take the reins since he spends more time observing Kaito’s teachings. It takes Kokichi a while to hold a tennis racket comfortably. He tries holding it with one hand before deciding that he’s better off using two.

Kaito expects Kokichi to screw around but to his surprise, he listens diligently. He changes his stance when Kaito asks him to and alters his grip when needed. Every time he fails to hit the ball over the net, Kokichi huffs and acts like the ball itself is personally responsible for not making it over.

“You’re not swinging the racket far enough,” Kaito tells him once Kokichi sends another ball directly into the net. He stands behind him and places his hands over the top of the leader’s before demonstrating how to swing the racket properly. “You’re swinging in a straight line when you should be trying to create an arch. Like this!”

He demonstrates a couple of times, keeping his hands on Kokichi’s until he’s satisfied the leader understands what he needs to do. Kaito steps away and Ryoma serves Kokichi a tennis ball. He hits it so hard it ends up on the opposite side of the room.

“Huh, so that’s how it works,” Kokichi says before turning to Ryoma. “Again!”

Ryoma rolls his eyes and serves another ball, which Kokichi hits once more. If Kaito didn’t know any better, he’d think Kokichi is pleased with his newfound skill. Kaito decides to not mention that hitting a ball over a net isn’t considered hard to most people.

He then looks over at Himiko and Angie. The magician hasn’t managed to successfully hit a ball over the net yet. Hmm, maybe Kokichi is doing better than Kaito thought.

Since Tenko looks like she’s still busy teaching, Kaito decides that his group can have a couple of practice games. He tells Kokichi where to stand as Ryoma makes his way over to the other side of the court.

“I’ll try not to hit the ball too hard for now,” Ryoma says. “Otherwise we’re not going to get much

practicing done.”

Kaito nods and turns to Kokichi, throwing him a tennis ball from one of his pockets. Kokichi barely manages to catch it and sneers playfully as he starts to bounce the ball up and down.

“Oh? Am I serving?”

“It’s good practice,” Kaito answers before getting into position. Like Ryoma, he holds his racket with only one hand. “Ready when you are!”

Kokichi bounces the ball one last time before hitting it. Kaito would be impressed with Kokichi’s technique if it wasn’t for the fact the leader hits the ball at him instead of at Ryoma. Kaito squawks as he barely dodges, causing the tennis ball to fly over a crouched over Himiko and into the wall. Himiko blinks as she stands up straight, holding a ball she must’ve dropped.

“What are you doing?!” Kaito huffs, shooting Kokichi an accusing look.

“You told me to serve the ball!”

“Yes, to Hoshi! Why did you aim it at me?!”

“...I wasn’t actually trying to hit you,” Kokichi grumbles.

“It was inevitable you were going to hit the ball in the wrong direction,” Ryoma calls from over the net. “Try and angle yourself towards the net instead of facing Momota.”

Things go a lot more smoothly after Kokichi follows Ryoma’s advice. Kaito wouldn’t say Kokichi is anywhere near as good as himself or Ryoma but he manages to play alongside them. They fumble through a couple of practice rounds, Kaito cheering his partner on the entire time. He notices Tenko watching them from the corner of his eye.

Eventually, the two groups merge. Himiko doesn’t waste any time before showing everyone that she can balance a ball on her tennis racket without dropping it.

“I’m not even using any magic to keep it from falling,” Himiko tells the group proudly before abruptly steering her racket to the side. She only just manages to keep the ball from slipping.

“Tenko thinks Yumeno and Angie have got the basics down,” Tenko says. “Although Tenko thinks it might be for the best if she pairs up with one of them during each game just to make things fair.”

The aikido master is definitely lacking her usual energy. Kaito wonders if she’s only sticking around to be polite. If that’s the case, he’ll just have to make up for her lack of enthusiasm himself.

“Then let’s get started!”

The group spends the morning playing game after game. The first couple of games are played rather clumsily. It takes a while for the less experienced players to get into the swing of things. Angie in particular struggles the most, although Kaito has a feeling that’s because she isn’t trying as hard as she could. However, even though Angie is clearly the worst player in the room, Himiko still cheers her on until her face turns red.

Himiko is giving him a run for his money for being the most enthusiastic person in the room. Even Ryoma seems impressed with her passionate cheerleading. She’s not the best player but she doesn’t seem to care. She seems more focussed on making sure Tenko and Angie have a good time. It’s sweet.

It takes a while for Tenko to put her all into playing. She swings her racket rather pathetically. She plays each game with minimal effort. She only truly starts to play with more vigour when Ryoma decides to up his game.

He asks her to play against him on her own. Although she's reluctant, she agrees. The rest of the group watches them from the side lines.

Kaito expects Ryoma to serve an easy to hit ball but he does the exact opposite. Tenko yelps as she instinctively dives for the tennis ball and barely manages to hit it back over the net.

“W-What are you doing?!”

“Playing tennis,” Ryoma easily answers. A crack echoes around the room as he decides to once again hit the tennis ball harshly.

Tenko lets out a flustered huff as she chases after the ball. “How is Tenko supposed to play when she can barely see the ball?!”

“I think you're doing pretty well,” Ryoma responds.

“You are!” Himiko agrees cheerfully, throwing her hands in the air. “Go Chabashira!”

Tenko gawks at the magician before screeching as she nearly misses the ball again.

So *this* is what Ryoma meant when he said he knew Tenko was a good player. Kaito watches them both play, letting out an impressed whistle as the ball flies back and forth. He even notices Angie perk up next to him. She's currently sitting with her back against the wall, her knees tucked up against her chest. There's a half finished water bottle next to her.

To Kaito's surprise, the tennis player decides to continue to play relentlessly. The astronaut then looks at Tenko and Ryoma's decision suddenly makes sense.

This is the first time in a while I've seen Tenko look so determined. Even at my party she looked rather gloomy. Huh. Who would've thought all she needed was a game of tennis to cheer her up.

The aikido master ends up losing, although she doesn't look too upset about her defeat. She slaps her hands onto her legs once the game is over, clearly out of breath after running around for so long.

“That was really impressive!” Himiko cries as she dashes over to Tenko, her voice filled with admiration. Before Tenko can react, the magician throws her arms around her and squeezes tight. “Nyeh, here! I'm giving you some of my MP so you can recover faster!”

Tenko blinks and completely misses the satisfied look on Ryoma's face as the tennis player walks past her to prop his racket against the wall.

“Good game, Chabashira,” Ryoma says. “I'd shake your hand but it looks like you're a little occupied.”

“I'm still transferring her MP,” Himiko mumbles into Tenko's shoulder.

“A-At least someone in this room is considerate,” Tenko quietly says before turning Himiko's hug. “Degenerate males never think things through properly. Tenko is exhausted thanks to Hoshi.”

Kaito wonders if he should step in and defend Ryoma but stops himself once he notices the small

smile on Ryoma's face. It grows wider once Ryoma spots Kaito's conflicted expression.

"If she's back to calling males degenerate then I think she's starting to feel better," Ryoma says before taking a sip from his water bottle.

The astronaut looks back over at Tenko and Himiko. Himiko has finally let go and is smiling lazily at Tenko whilst the aikido master grumbles about how tired she is. He almost jumps when Angie slips past him with a bottle of water, her footsteps quiet. The artist offers the bottle to Tenko, who takes it gratefully.

"There's absolutely no way I'm playing against Hoshi after watching all that!"

Kaito spins around and spots Kokichi wearing a bewildered expression.

"I bet we can beat him one day," Kaito reassures him.

Kokichi stares at him like he's said something incredibly stupid. "Your optimism never fails to astound me, spaceman."

"I mean it, I bet we can," Kaito presses. "The more we practice, the higher chance we have of winning--"

"We'd have to practice for a million years to get to Hoshi's level," Kokichi says. "And I doubt anyone here wants to stay in the simulation for *that* long."

"Dude, you're being dramatic," Kaito sighs. "About both things you said, actually. We'll be out of here sooner rather than later, got it? My sidekick has--"

"Are you on about the very same sidekick who couldn't even convince *Angie* to move when he needed her to?" Kokichi asks, causing Kaito to abruptly snap his mouth shut. "If Saihara is our best line of defence then I personally think we're all screwed."

"The hell are you on about?" Kaito asks, narrowing his eyes.

"...he failed to convince Angie to move. What chance does he have of convincing a room full of strangers to end what is literally the *world's* most popular game show?"

There's a blank expression on Kokichi's face which Kaito thinks he's wearing on purpose.

"Angie's an exception," Kaito insists. "It's not my sidekick's fault she's abnormally stubborn--"

"If he can't deal with *one* stubborn person then how is he supposed to deal with multiple of them?"

"He's capable! I know he is! So--"

"Are you two having an argument?"

Ryoma approaches them both cautiously, a slight frown on his face.

"...of course we're not!" Kokichi brightly says before his eyes go dramatically wide. "Oh wow, would you look at the time!"

The tennis player tilts his head to the side. "Ouma?"

Kokichi leaves before anyone can stop him, rambling out some half baked excuse as he dashes out of Ryoma's lab.

“...what happened?” Ryoma asks cautiously, shoving his hands into his pockets.

“He just...” Kaito scratches the back of his head as he stares at the door Kokichi just ran out of. “Fucking starting spouting shit about Shuichi out of nowhere.”

“Saihara?”

“One second everything was fine and the next...” Kaito sighs. “He was saying he doesn’t think my sidekick is capable of ending Danganronpa. Said because he couldn’t convince Angie to move, he wouldn’t be able to end Danganronpa.”

“Oh.” Ryoma stays suspiciously silent.

“Wonder what his problem is,” Kaito mumbles before putting a hand on his hip. “I mean, *something* has to be up with him, right? I still think it’s kind of weird that it took him so long to rejoin us. He said he was sick but...”

“I did think it was strange that Kiibo didn’t send him back into the simulation once he was able to stand,” Ryoma admits quietly. “Makes me wonder if Ouma took so long to rejoin on purpose.”

“Do you think something happened to him in the office?”

“I’m not sure. I doubt Kiibo would’ve done anything to upset him on purpose so...”

Kaito rubs his chin thoughtfully. “Either way, it’s immature of him to just run away instead of confronting his issues head on. He clearly has something on his mind.”

“Maybe go easy on him for now,” Ryoma suggests. “We don’t know what’s going through his head. If something’s bothering him then getting angry at him is just going to make things worse.”

“I-I’m not angry at him,” Kaito says before pausing. Kokichi knows that, right? All he was trying to do was defend his sidekick.

And if he gets angry at him then things will spiral and it’ll be him and Kokichi and...

...there’ll be lots of blood and a...

...loud crunch and...

...then it’ll just be Kaito...

...he feels sick...

“Momota?”

“Ah...” Kaito quickly shakes his head and tries to ignore how the world blurs when he shakes it too much. “Sorry, did you say something?”

“You...had this look on your face,” Ryoma tells him quietly. “Like you were...scared.”

“Me? Scared? *No way!*” Kaito ruffles Ryoma’s hat to give his hands something to do. He doesn’t want Ryoma to notice that they’re shaking. “I just...”

“Did you remember something?”

“...nah, was just...thinking, that’s all,” Kaito answers.

Ryoma doesn't look like he entirely believes him but is nice enough to not call him out. "I think it's time we call it quits for today. No point overworking ourselves."

Kaito's thankful for the excuse to leave and exits Ryoma's lab with a hasty goodbye, shoving his hands into his pockets before anyone can notice that they're still trembling. If anyone asks, he'll just say he trapped a nerve or something.

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